THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA

FORTEAN TIMES

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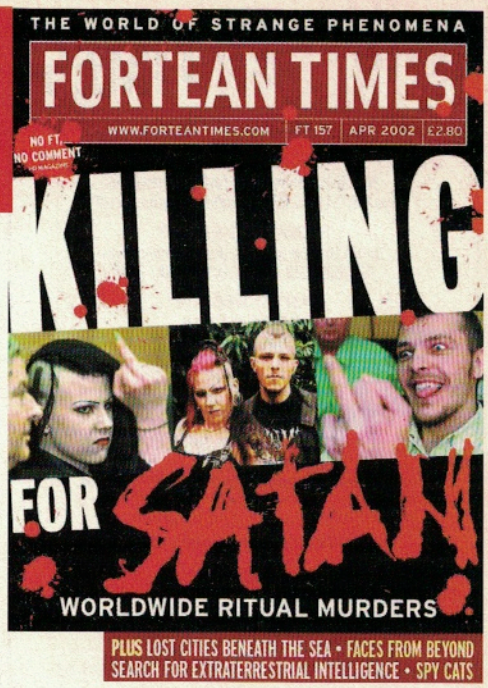

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GRAHAM HANCOCK
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UNCON 2002

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EDITORIAL

DOING THE DEVIL'S WORK

AP PHOTO/FRANK ANGSTEIN

SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN

Our lead story this issue – a vampiric murder by young German Goths who claimed to be following orders from Satan – keeps company with a handful of other stories about ritualistic murders. Sadly – and probably to the chagrin of the 'rational' sceptics – they are now not uncommon and apparently demonstrate a willing commitment to an anti-establishment mythology. This murder says volumes about modern disaffected youth, hitting out at both Christian theology and institutional authority; but is it necessarily Satanic, as both outraged Christians and the perpetrators themselves claim?

Significantly, there is no suggestion of a sinister organisation here; no subversive cult, except the general cult of youthful rebellion. How very different is the implication of the young black boy's torso found in the Thames on 21 September last year. All the signs are that he was killed for particular parts used in magic rituals, according to experts consulted by British police. These experts were pathologists and other officials from various African countries where similar ritual murders are endemic.

In Africa, there are two prime motives for the kidnap and slaying of youngsters: sacrifice to obtain some divine favour; and the trade in *muti*, amulets made from body-parts and claimed to have great magical power. There are many curious African churches, hybrids of Christianity and enduring local animism, and many of these have established congregations among immigrant African communities in Britain. There is no suggestion that any of these communities practise, or even condone, *muti* rituals (indeed, some of their leaders have publicly expressed their abhorrence of *muti*), but this boy was cut up by someone who took part in, or commissioned, the murder for the express purpose of obtaining *muti*.

FT's correspondents have sent us local reports of *muti* killings for more than two decades. Most of the victims come from Africa, South America and India. In South America and Africa there is evidence that gangs are involved in the procurement, killing ritually being an important ingredient in the magic properties of *muti*. In nearly all other cases, children seem to have been sacrificed by their parents or by relatives, sometimes in an appallingly casual manner and for the most trivial of reasons.

Unlike the largely groundless panic in western societies over Satanic Ritual Abuse (on which we have reported in past issues), there is no doubt about the horrible reality of the ritual death and mutilation of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of children in Africa, India and South America. And, now these cultish criminals have brought their foul trade to London; where next?

UNCONVENTION 2002

We are pleased to announce three first-class additions to the full schedule of events. Graham Hancock – fresh from diving expeditions and his recent documentary series on Channel 4 – will present the latest information on controversial new underwater sites off India that appear to predate the earliest known cities by 5,000 years. Jon Ronson will be recalling meetings with conspiracy theorists and militia types during the making of his *Secret Rulers of the World* series. And Gary Lachman, occultist and rock musician, will conduct a live interview with Colin Wilson who, on his 70th birthday, looks back on his extensive literary career as an authority on occultism, murder and the paranormal. For up-to-the-minute information on speakers, booking and other details, please go to our website – www.forteantimes.com – and follow the links to the UnCon pages.

BOB RICKARD PAUL SIEVEKING

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'FORTEAN'?

FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort.

Throughout his life, Fort was sceptical about scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data was ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away (which is quite different from explaining a thing).

Fort, born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

His dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate state between extremes. He had ideas of the universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena.

He coined the term 'teleportation' and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

CHARLES HOY FORT
(1874-1932)

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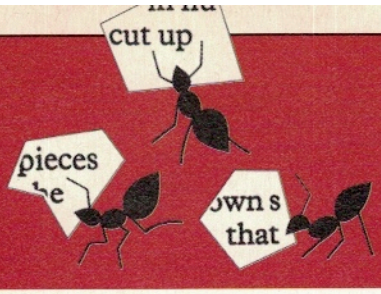

strangedays
A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

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Return of the triangles
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Wire-wearing CIA cat
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CITY UNDER THE SEA

Carbon-dating pushes Indus history back by millennia and Hancock goes underwater

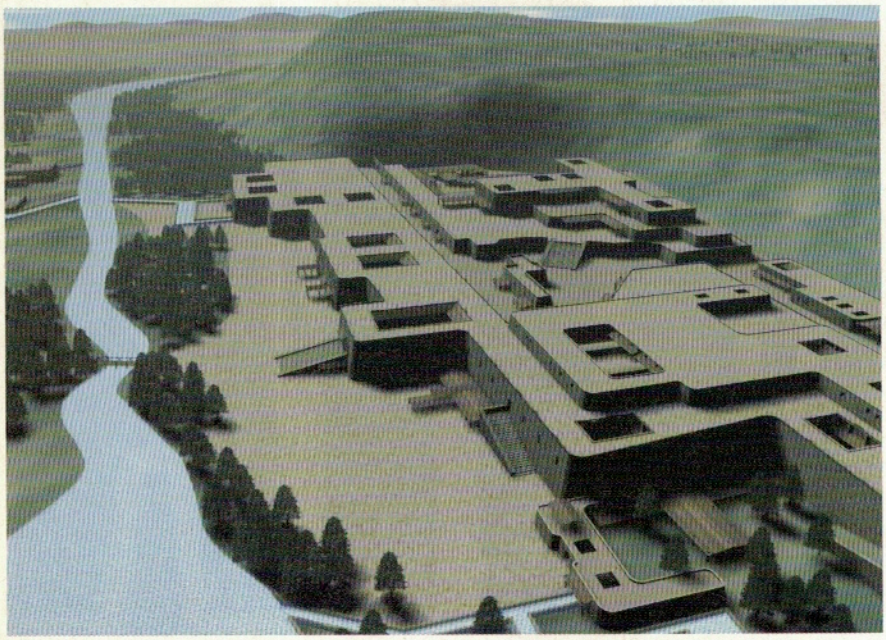


IMAGE: CHANNEL 4/CLOCKWORK DIGITAL

SO GRAHAM HANCOCK: How the cities may have looked (above) and author Hancock (bottom).

A GRID OF GEOMETRIC STRUCTURES thought to be the foundations of two cities, each more than five miles (8km) wide, have been detected 120ft (37m) below sea level in the Gulf of Cambay (Khambhat), 40 miles (64km) off Gujarat peninsula in western India.

Over the last eight months, fragments of pottery and figurines, crescent-shaped objects, beads, human bones and possible construction stones with holes and studs were recovered with a dredging scoop from the site, which lies next to what was once the fork of a river.

Two pieces of carved wood were sent to separate laboratories at the Birbal Sahni Palæobotany Institute and the National Geophysical Research Institute. They were carbon-dated to around 7500 BC – a stunning result, given that the neighbouring Harrapan and Indus Valley communities are generally agreed to date from no earlier than 2500 BC.

Dr Badrinarayan and a team of Indian oceanographers discovered the remains while carrying out pollution checks. Sonar scans of the area revealed one six-mile (10km) long conurbation, with a second smaller settlement eight miles (13km) to the south. Besides squares and rectangles, more complex structures were indicated, such as a staircase and a courtyard. A large incised stone slab could bear one of the earliest discovered forms of writing.

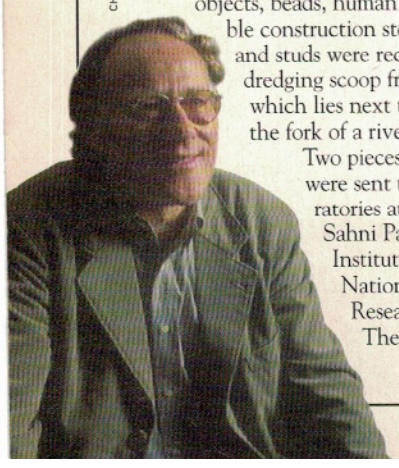
Following the success of his last book and TV series, *Fingerprints of the Gods*, Graham Hancock, thorn in the side of established archæology, says he wanted to address the calls for better evidence of sophisticated civilisations in the ancient past. The discovery of the Yonaguni site off Japan [*FT*114:40-43] alerted him to the prospect that more evidence may lie on the estimated 10 million square miles (26 million sq km) of land submerged at the end of the Ice Age.

"I first started looking into Indian underwater cities in 1992," Hancock told *FT*, "and I've been following these finds in the Gulf of Cambay very closely for seven or eight months." Hancock promises to bring his latest findings to the *FT* UnConvention, shortly after he returns from exploring yet another underwater site off Southern India.

These discoveries form part of his next book, *Underworld: Flooded Kingdoms Of The Ice Age*, and one segment of the three-part Channel 4 TV series starting on 11 February. Hancock has said that scans of the seabed showed foundations suggesting buildings up to three storeys high and walls running for more than 400ft (122m). The conventional view is that the period 9000 BC to 4000 BC was characterised by village economies and farming, with urbanisation only taking place later.

Justin Morris, curator of South Asian antiquities at the British Museum, who has spent years working around the Indus valley and Gujarat peninsula, says there is no evidence for cities existing earlier than 5,500 years ago. "Civilisations do not exist in isolation," he said. "Towns and cities have a big impact on the agriculture and settlements for hundreds of square miles around them. There are no signs of such an impact in this area."

Much hangs on the carbon-dating of the carved wood. The technique is inexact, especially on objects that have been underwater for millennia. Even if the results were accurate, the wood might have been there long before the city was built. *Times, D.Mail, D.Telegraph, 19 Jan; Sunday Times, 20 Jan 2002.*



CHANNEL 4

COMPETITION

SEE PAGE 62 OF THIS MONTH'S 'REVIEWS' SECTION FOR A CHANCE TO WIN COPIES OF GRAHAM HANCOCK'S NEW BOOK *UNDERWORLD: FLOODED KINGDOMS OF THE ICE AGE.*

RAFTS OF THE DEAD

Micronesians worried by arrival of mysterious floating skeletons

REUTERS/POPPERFOTO

RUN AGROUND: One of the bamboo rafts – minus its distressing cargo – washed up on a small pacific island.

IN MID-SEPTEMBER 2001, a fisherman called Uandiki on the island of Woleai, one of the 607 comprising the Federated States of Micronesia in the Pacific, spotted a sturdily-built bamboo raft, measuring 6ft by 4ft (1.8m by 1.2m), lashed to bamboo poles, which was entangled in tall weeds, a few yards from the sandy shore. He knew from the giant bamboo that it must have come from far away, as such a plant doesn't grow on the islands. There were rumours circulating in his village of similar rafts having been found in the previous days.

Uandiki waded into the water to take a look and found the skeletons of two people, one of them a baby, curled up together. From the remnants of shredded clothing he took them to be mother and child. There was a very old kerosene lamp, empty water containers, a bunch of shrivelled and rotting bananas and a pot of rice, so the pair had not died of starvation.

In the ensuing weeks, 13 similar rafts, bearing five sun-bleached skeletons in total, were washed up on the shores of neighbouring islands and atolls. One had the number 3 emblazoned on its side; some had the remains of torn sails, others were clearly

THE ISLANDERS BELIEVE THE BONES ARE AN OMEN OF EVIL

powered by outboard motors which had sheared off. Dr Rupenio Mauricio, an archæologist based on the main Micronesian island of Pohnpei, studied the bones and concluded that the raft people had died at least four weeks before. The islanders believe that the bones are a potent omen of evil and are in some way connected with the 11 September attacks in the US.

The most likely theory is that the rafts were built by people fleeing inter-ethnic violence in Indonesia. On board one, police found a wallet containing a faded identity card belonging to a man from Bitung in the Indonesian province of Sulawesi, 1,000 miles (1,600 km) to the south-west. Yet while the region has a long history of clashes between Christians and Muslims, Indonesian authorities were not aware of any refugee exodus in the previous six months. It is possible that those on board were already dead when the rafts were put to sea; but why would anyone do this?

Another possibility is that the bodies are the remains of a group on a fishing expedition, with the rafts being swept from Indonesia or the Philippines by the Equatorial Counter Current, which sweeps north-east from Sulawesi in a roughly counter-clockwise direction. Or perhaps they were blown off course from Irian Jaya or Papua New Guinea.

Four months on, no-one knows who they were, where they came from, where they were going or how they died. The local police have called in the FBI from the neighbouring island of Guam to help them with the investigation. "It does not add up," said Jasmine Henry, the journalist who first broke the story in the Micronesian papers. "If I was on a raft and someone died, I would throw them overboard. But there were several corpses found together on one raft. The other strange thing is that their disappearance doesn't seem to have been reported..." On 26 January, there were rumours that another raft had drifted ashore, this time on Yap, one of the tiniest islands. *[AFP] 17 Jan; Scotsman, 22 Jan; D.Telegraph, 24 Jan; Sunday Telegraph, 27 Jan 2002.*

EXTRA EXTRA

HEADLINES FROM NEWSPAPERS AROUND THE WORLD

OLD GONDOLIERS SUCCESSFULLY THROWN OVERBOARD
D.Telegraph, 6 April 2001.

HASHIMOTO TIPPED TO RISE FROM THE DEAD
Melbourne Age, 6 April 2001.

SPOOK LICENSED TO CARRY ON OPERATIONS IN SALTCOATS
Ardrossan & Saltcoats Herald, 6 April 2001.

THE HILLS ARE ALIVE WITH THE SOUND OF EXPLODING COWS
Sunday Telegraph, 8 April 2001.

QUEEN HAS THE COUNTESS FOR DINNER
Times, 8 April 2001.

DEMONS WIN WITH SECONDS ON THE CLOCK
TNT Magazine, 9 April 2001.

RABBI CALLS ON GOD TO ANNIHILATE THE ARABS
D.Telegraph, 10 April 2001.

GIANT LAGS BEHIND IN BUYING BRITISH, SURVEY CLAIMS
Guardian, 11 April 2001.

RUBBER FIRM IN FOREIGN HANDS
Northside Chronicle (Chermside, Australia), 11 April 2001.

ELECTRIC SHOCKS TO REVIVE BRIDGES
Times, 14 April 2001.

MURDERED MAN SAVES FOUR LIVES
Times, 14 April 2001.

BROWN SET TO TRY OUT NEW FACES IN POLAND
Scotsman, 17 April 2001.

POLICE HUNT CASH TILL TRIO ARMED WITH WRENCH
Hemel Hempstead Herald Express, 17 April 2001.

ANGELS ARE HELL SAY NEIGHBOURS
South Wales Evening Post, 18 April 2001.

FEW STUDENTS HERE ANSWERING MOBILE CALLS FROM SOCRATES
Irish Times, 18 April 2001.

SQUIRRELS BLAMED FOR BLAZE
Harrow Leader, 19 April 2001.

TOKYO COWERS FROM GIANT CROWS
Guardian, 19 April 2001.

OFF COURSE: An adult Eastern White Pelican, weighing 11lb (5kg), was injured on Boxing Day after flying into power lines at Saham Toney, near Watton, Norfolk, and was taken to the RSPCA's Norfolk Wildlife Hospital. No such bird had been reported missing by any zoo, wildlife park or private collector; it is possible (but unlikely) that it flew over from Africa or southern Europe, where they live in the wild. *Eastern Daily Press, 4 Jan 2002.*

RESOURCEFUL BIRD: A turkey destined for the Christmas dinner table escaped from a farm on 4 December and found its way to a bird sanctuary. It is thought that the bird walked up to three miles (4.8km), crossing fields, streams and busy roads, before it was found by Bruce Berry outside his New Forest Owl Sanctuary near Ringwood, Hampshire. He took the bird in, named it Terence, and decided to keep it. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 10 Dec 2001.*

LIFT JONAH: Workers at a Düsseldorf insurance firm are refusing to get into lifts at the 26-storey building with colleague Karlpeter Arens, 59, who has been stuck in elevators 40 times. He was first stuck when he was six and was once trapped for eight hours. *Sunday Mail, 11 Nov 2001.*

C'EST LA GUERRE: From the *Nuneaton Evening Telegraph* (25 Aug 2001): "On this day, 1944, Paris was liberated, having been occupied by French forces since June 1940."

LONG ODDS: A retired delivery man bought a vase at a jumble sale in Ammanford, Carmarthenshire, and discovered inside a receipt showing that he had delivered it himself in 1949. *Worcestershire Eve. Mail, 15 Dec 2001.*

UNLUCKY NAME: Despite her high qualifications, a graduate has been turned down for dozens of sales jobs in China because her name is Pei, which sounds like the Chinese word for "lose money in business". Superstitious employers in Changchun lose interest as soon as she tells them her name, reported the *People's Daily. Sunday Times, 2 Dec 2001.*

A DESIGN FOR LIVING

Latest consumer spiritualism fad bad news for terraced house sales

INGRID COLE

Now that *feng shui* has lost its cachet (the "*feng shui* kitchen roll" available in a London supermarket and the "*Feng Shui* > Supplies and Furnishings" category on Yahoo! says it all), *vastu* (or *vashtu*) might be the next interior decoration philosophy to part trend-followers from their hard-earned cash. Described as "the world's oldest holistic discipline of design", *vastu* originated in Vedic India some 5,000 years ago and has been the wellspring of Indian aesthetics ever since.

It supposedly pre-dated and inspired *feng shui*. Like *feng shui*, it is giving rise to a small industry in America and Europe, based on its idea that we can improve our lives by rearranging our dwellings. Deprived of its cultural context, a certain trivialisation is almost inevitable as *vastu* is integrated into western consumer society.

Two books published in the USA in 2000 have been selling well: *Vastu Living: Creating a Home for the Soul* by Kathleen Cox and *The Vastu Vidya Handbook* by Juliet Pegrum. Both authors have spent many years living in India and are now *vastu* consultants in New York.

By keeping the five basic elements of the Universe – *Akash* (sky), *Prithvi* (earth), *Paani* (water), *Agni* (fire), and *Vayu* (wind) – in harmony, joy and happiness will infuse our lives. In India there are weekly TV shows and shelves full of books devoted to *vastu*.

Advice given by *vastu* practitioners is bound to vary widely, but might include some of the following: your front door should not be facing the front door of the opposite house (which would rule out most terraced streets). Your sitting room should be in the west part of the house to promote memory and intelligence and enliven social activities; photos of your grandparents in the south-west part so you can access their wisdom; and cupboards in the southern or western parts of the house. A terrace or balcony should be either in the east or the north. Don't put your guest room over your verandah or basement, unless you want guests to suffer from mental instability. Paint your home office yellow to stimulate creative thinking.

According to Yuvaraj Sowma, an hereditary *vastu* practitioner currently lecturing in Kuala Lumpur, *vastu* invests basil with a crucial importance as it is the only plant that can identify negative energies and ward them off.

As one *vastu* website puts it: "You will discover the right place to put your bed in your bedroom, the right direction for you to face when you work, the right location to take a healthy break, the right place for your children to study, the right location for your computer or TV, [and] the right place to put heavy furniture."

God is present in the direction of north-east. The port of Mumbai (Bombay) prospers because the atomic plant is on the city's south-east, where *Agni* is located, and the main body of water is to its north-east. London is rich because situated more or less according to the ideal principles of *vastu*, and New York and Boston are rich because they are in the north-east of the United States. *Houston (TX) Chronicle, 14 Dec 2000; and numerous web sites.*

DISAPPEARING VICTIMS

The WTC's dwindling death toll and a posthumous misidentification

WITH MOST MAJOR DISASTERS, THE number of dead grows with each successive news report. Take the 36-hour storm that pounded Algeria on 10 November. The number of dead grew in press reports between 12 & 17 November: 287, 310, 340, 343, 575, 579, 585, 618, 651, 707. *UK and Irish national dailies, 12–17 Nov 2001.*

By contrast, the number of dead in the World Trade Center on 11 September has been steadily shrinking, as duplications and errors are resolved. First, it was put at 6,700; then 5,000; then 4,500; then 4,000. The official figure dropped by at least 200 over the weekend of 17–18 November alone, when the unofficial estimate, combining information from companies, airlines and other sources, reached no higher than 2,950 (against the official 3,702). One kind of error was exemplified on 20 November, when a woman was found to be listed twice – under her maiden and married names. By early December the figure was officially 3,300 and still falling. The number of British dead, first estimated at around 350, had fallen to 78.

However, the figure of 5,000 to 6,000 dead in all the attacks of 11 September was still routinely quoted – even by Colin Powell – and seemed firmly set in popular folklore. It's fairly certain that 189 died at the Pentagon, including 64 on American Airlines Flight 77; and 44 on United Airlines Flight 93, which crashed outside Pittsburgh.

11 September is no longer the bloodiest day in American history. At least 3,650 soldiers were killed at the Civil War battle of Sharpsburg in Virginia on 17 September 1862, with nearly 20,000 wounded. The number of injured on 11 September was negligible; according to the worst scenario, up to 50,000 people might have died. *NY Times, 24 Oct, 21 Nov; [AFP] 3 Dec; D.Telegraph, 4 Dec 2001.*

The body of Christopher Santora, 23, a fireman at Engine Co. 54 in the Hell's Kitchen neighbourhood of Manhattan, was pulled from the rubble of the twin towers on 24 September and wrongly identified as that of Jose Guadalupe, 37, a colleague in the same fire station. Both wore flat gold chains and had the same congenital anomaly in the neck vertebrae. The condition of the body made fingerprinting impossible. Santora was given a funeral on 1 October by Guadalupe's family. Santora's parents attended, unaware their son was in the coffin. The body was exhumed after DNA tests showed the real identity. Guadalupe's body has not been recovered. ***[AP] 29 Nov 2001.***

FLEET FLYING FROG'S FEET

STEPHEN DALTON/NHPA

This photograph by Stephen Dalton is the first to show the yellow-and-black webbed feet of Wallace's flying frog. These are visible only when the frog, a native of the East Indies, is in full flight, and it jumps so fast that its movements are difficult for the human eye to register. With legs stretched to their full 7in (18cm) span, the frog sails several feet through the air. The photograph features in a touring exhibition of Mr Dalton's work, which opened in Cardiff in July. ***S. Telegraph, 3 June 2001.***

IMMORTAL CHINESE: Statistics indicate that only eight of Austria's 55,000 Chinese have died in the last decade when the expected figure was about 110 per annum. Authorities believe that many bodies are secretly disposed of while the dead "live on", with their passports and identities bequeathed so relatives and friends can find a new life in the West. *Scotsman, D.Telegraph, 5 Oct 2001.*

FEET OF ENDURANCE: On 20 September, John Muir, 40, became the first person to cross the Australian continent alone and unaided. He and his Jack Russell terrier walked for 16 weeks and 2,500km (1,550 miles), crossing from Adelaide to Burketown. He pulled a cart with 200kg (440lb) of supplies. ***South China Morning Post, 21 Sept 2001.***

CLAM CLUE: A clam found on the Atlantic seabed has given further evidence that Australia's coast was explored 80 years before Captain Cook set foot on the continent. The clam, of a kind only found in the Pacific, is believed to be from William Dampier's ship *HMS Roebuck*, which sank in the Atlantic in 1699 after sailing round the world. *Metro, 22 Oct 2001.*

WORTH THE WAIT: A London woman whose £10,000 watch was stolen four years ago has had it returned after the police recovered it, now inlayed with diamonds and worth £32,000. ***Wolverhampton Express & Star, 10 Dec 2001.***

GREEN PARTY, RED FACES: Phil Gully asked New Zealand's Green Party to support a ban on a substance he said kills thousands each year, is used in nuclear submarines and found in acid rain. It is dihydrogen monoxide. Certainly, said the Greens. Dihydrogen monoxide is water. *Independent on Sunday, 28 Oct 2001.*

FELINE LUCKY: A couple from Hornchurch, Essex, discovered that a hefty phone bill was due to their cat dialling the premium rate number of a racing tips hotline. ***Romford Recorder, 27 July 2001.***

DONKEY'S YEARS: Sancho the donkey has reached a world record age of 54, twice the average lifespan. Henrietta Weld, 29, of Lulworth, Dorset, was given him as a pet when she was one. *News of the World, 26 Aug 2001.*

NEW RAT TRICK: Rats that can dive to the bottom of rivers for mussels and snails are set to spread across Britain. Piles of mussel shells with rat teeth marks and droppings have been found beside the River Nene in Cambridgeshire. *Guardian, 9 Sept; S. Times (Australia), 23 Sept 2001.*

WHITE KNUCKLE RIDE: After a car being driven by a woman in her 20s broke down on a dark country road on Christmas Eve, a man in a security uniform pulled over and offered to help, remarking oddly: "I am not a weirdo". He towed the car for five miles at 90mph (145km/h), overtaking cars as she flashed her lights at him. They finally stopped at Kingsteignton, Devon, where he quickly unhitched and sped off. *Sun, 26 Dec 2001.*

SMART PUSSY: A lioness in Cameroon has shown that cats can use tools. Hans Bauer of Leiden University, Holland, watched the lioness use a thorn held between her teeth to pick out another thorn stuck in her paw. He didn't see whether the operation was successful, but the next day she showed no sign of a sore paw. *African Journal of Ecology, v39, p317, Sept 2001.*

HEAVENLY MISSILE: Villagers fearing they were being bombed rushed to nearby barracks for protection after what was thought to be a large meteorite landed near Kauyen Toro in north-west Nigeria. *[AFP] 10 Nov 2001.*

SWAN AGGRO: A 46-year-old Yorkshire woman dressed as a dog suffered a broken wrist when she was knocked over by a 28-year-old man dressed as a 9ft (2.7m) swan called Cyril, the mascot of Swansea City Football Club at the Mascot Grand National, held at Huntingdon Racecourse in Cambridgeshire on 30 September 2001. *Times, 14 Dec 2001.*

SWEET DREAMS: A man from Uckfield, East Sussex, who dreamed he would find treasure buried in his garden spent thousands of pounds digging, and discovered a well with mineral-rich water which is set to make him a fortune. *Brighton Eve. Argus, 25 Oct 2001.*

UFO RETURN OF THE TRIANGLES

FLYING TRIANGLES AND MYSTERIOUS SPHERES KEEP BELGIAN UFOLOGISTS BUSY, WHILE MALAYSIA GOES UFO CRAZY. **MARK PILKINGTON** BRINGS US THE LATEST NEWS.

UFOS OVER BELGIUM

In December 2001, several UFOs, including the famed Flying Triangles, made a dramatic return to Belgian skies, featuring in major newspaper articles and on television.

On 6 December, a policeman in the Blommes district of Mouscron, on the south-west border with France, saw two triangular-shaped configurations of blue lights – then again on 9 December, in approximately the same location. One of the triangles had disappeared by later that morning. The report states that the same man saw identical phenomena in the same location at the time of the 1989 flaps. Early on the morning of 15 December, a woman living in the Mont-a-leux region of the town saw "an imposing mass" pass over her street before disappearing from view.

SOBEPS

Meanwhile, the largest Belgian UFO group, SOBEPS (Société Belge d'Étude des Phénomènes Spatiaux) is analysing a videotape of 12 mysterious spheres filmed over Chaumont-Gistoux in August 2001. SOBEPS video analyst Patrick Ferryn told ***FT***: "One can clearly see at least eight balls or spheres of light, very luminous, pale orange in colour, against a clear blue sky. They move slowly at first, gathering at a certain point high up in the sky, stopping there a while before vanishing all of a sudden." Ferryn notes similarities to lights filmed over Carteret, New Jersey, on 15 July 2001 [see ***FT150:23***]. *La Derniere Heure, 19 Dec 2001 (via www.rense.com). SOBEPS: http://www.sobeps.org/*

USED PARTS FOR SALE

James Hughes of Port St John, Florida, placed an advertisement in the *Florida Today* newspaper offering a piece of a genuine UFO for sale – at a bargain price of only $10 million.

Hughes claims that a friend of his was in a New Jersey rubbish dump 45 years ago when a cigar-shaped craft dumped the object nearby. An alleged analysis by a university is said to have identified unusual metal alloys, though those who have seen the debris describe it simply as "rock-like". At the time of going to press Hughes' best offer was $7.5 million. *http://www.mycfnow.com 7 Jan 2002.*

MALAYSIAN UFO EXPLOSION

One line of thought in psychosocial ufology connects UFO flaps with times of social, political or cultural upheaval. In the past year, Malaysians have seen more socio-economic drama than most Europeans see in a lifetime, and coincidentally or not, a dramatic doubling of UFO reports – from three in 2000 to six in 2001.

Ahmad Jamaludin of the Centre for Malaysian UFO Studies received reports of a flying disc over the city of Kota Kinabalu in the north-eastern Sabah region, another bluish UFO in the same area, and also, from Sabah, a dramatic 11-day abduction of a man who had previously described meeting a square-headed entity who sought to "take him away" [see ***FT148:23***]. In May, Ahmad also investigated an alleged landing of an object at Baling in the Kedah Eastern Kedah region. But a fleet of UFOs seen by numerous witnesses over Petaling Jaya in February was later identified as paper good luck lanterns, released as part of the Chap Goh Meh celebration.

Ahmad suggests a connection between geophysical activity and UFOs: "Gravitational forces emitted by objects in space cause the Earth's fault lines to shake causing earthquakes and, at the same time, acting as a guide for UFOs to reach Earth". Ahmad has plotted a 10-year cycle to Malaysian UFO waves and expects to see another one in around 2009. *Malaysian Star, 7 Jan 2002.*

FLYING TRIANGLES HISTORY

Between November 1989 and March 1990, the Belgian authorities logged over 2,500 witness reports of UFOs, including the now-famous Flying Triangles, in their airspace. The wave began on 29 November 1989, with the sighting of a triangular-shaped craft by numerous witnesses, including several policemen. Its climax came on the night of 30/31 March 1990 when, after apparent radar confirmation of an unidentified object, two F-16 fighter jets were scrambled to intercept. One of the planes was at first said to have had a radar lock on the object, which then appeared to accelerate away at high speed.

Initially, Belgian military authorities confirmed the encounters and admitted their inability to identify the objects. Later however, sceptics – the Belgian Defence Minister among them – suggested that the F16 was in fact alternately pursuing radar "ground clutter" and the other fighter jet, while at least one part of the police officers' lengthy November sighting was likely to have been of the planet Venus. The triangular craft may also have been a blimp – certainly one witness described seeing a "propeller" and hearing a sound like a ventilator fan. However, many of the witness sightings – only a small number of them actually triangles – remain unexplained and the Flying Triangles have passed into UFO legend.

HUMAN TAIL

A baby with a 4in (10cm) 'tail' was born somewhere in India (the report doesn't specify where) to Muslim parents in February 2001. He is called Balaji or Bajrangbali, alternative names for the monkey god Hanuman. Iqbal Qureshi, the child's maternal grandfather, has been taking Balaji from temple to temple, where people offer money to see him. Mr Qureshi says the baby has nine spots on his body like Lord Hanuman. For a round-up of tailed humans, see *FT52:52-54. Ananova, 11 Jan 2002.*

SIDELINES

NEAR THING: According to Larry Adler's book *Have I Ever Told You?*, Al Capone bribed a juror $25,000 to reduce a murder charge on one of his men to manslaughter. "I never thought you'd get away with manslaughter," said Capone afterwards. "Oh boy," replied the juror, "you don't know how difficult it was. They wanted to acquit him." *D.Telegraph, 26 Oct 2001.*

CAT SPLAT: A Dutch couple on holiday in Turkey last year made befriended a stray cat they called Shansle. After learning that the authorities intended shooting all strays, they spent hundreds of pounds to fly out, rescue it and take it home. Around New Year, Shansle ventured out and was run over. *Independent on Sunday, 6 Jan 2002.*

HALF CUT: Linda Harris, 53, the co-ordinator of an anti-drink-driving programme in New Mexico, was arrested for drunk-driving after colleagues saw her parking erratically during an alcohol awareness picnic in Las Cruces. She failed four out of five sobriety tests. *Bergen Record (Hackensack, NJ), 28 July 2001.*

CREATIVE CRIME: On 7 October a man in his early forties attempted to steal cars from residents in Ogden, Utah, while threatening himself with a handgun. Unable to persuade him to hand over the gun, police shot him with a "non-lethal weapon" and took him into custody. *Ogden (UT) Standard-Examiner, 10 Oct 2001.*

TOE CHAMPION: Jeff Lutz from St James, Manitoba, Canada, believes his cat Nabu is a world record-holder with 26 toes, one more than Twinkle-Toes, the current champion. Nabu, a Siamese cross, has seven toes on each hind paw and six on each front paw. The normal complement is five on hind paws and four on front paws. *Ananova, 23 Oct 2001.*

TIME WARP: A US man who went to buy bread on 25 July 1969 returned 32 years later, with no recollection of where he had been. Carl Hoede, 57, thought the Vietnam war was still being fought. *Sunday Mail (Scotland), 16 Sept 2001.*

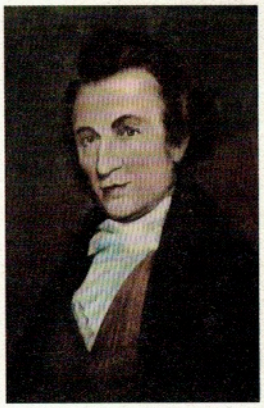
FINDING GOOD AND EVIL

Tom Paine's skull turns up down under; Nazi relic fished from lake

COMMON SENSE BURIAL

Admirers of Tom Paine (1737–1809), the Norfolk-born pamphleteer who wrote *The Rights of Man* and coined the term "United States", plan to gather his remains and lay them to rest in a memorial in New Rochelle, New York State, where the great radical settled in 1784. So far, the Thomas Paine National Historical Association has his mummified brain stem and a lock of hair, but his skull is rumoured to be in Australia, a rib may be in France and some of his bones may have been made into buttons.

Ten years after Paine's death in 1809, his admirer William Cobbett dug up his bones in New Rochelle and smuggled them back to England, where the plan was to rebury them with a wonderful monument as a rallying point for the poor and downtrodden masses. Cobbett intended to raise the required funds by exhibiting the body at "bone rallies" round the country; but general apathy and ridicule, reinforced by a government ban, thwarted his plan.



BETTMAN/CORBIS

The conservative press had so successfully vilified Paine that he was almost as unpopular as Napoleon, and many towns burnt him in effigy on Guy Fawkes Day in preference to Guy Fawkes. Cobbett was reduced to selling locks of Paine's hair to raise a few shillings. Lord Byron wrote: "In digging up your bones, Tom Paine,/ Will Cobbett has done well;/ You visit him on earth again,/ He'll visit you in hell."

On Cobbett's death in 1835, the bones passed to his son, who kept them at the family farm in Surrey until at least 1844. Some maintained that they were interred in 1849 in the nearby churchyard of Ash, or in the garden of a descendant of Cobbett; others claim the remains were owned at various times by Cobbett's secretary Benjamin Tilley (who extracted and kept the brain stem), by a day labourer named George West, and by a furniture dealer in London.

Paine's skull was allegedly procured by an Australian antiquarian visiting London. This relic, stored in a leather pouch and marked with the inscription THOS PAINE, was bought at a Sydney auction in 1988 by John Burgess, an academic from New South Wales who is convinced that he is a direct descendant. An unsubstantiated tradition has persisted that in 1797 Paine's lover, Marguerite de Bonneville, gave birth to his child. Burgess hopes that the identity of the skull, as well as his claim to be a descendant, can be established by DNA tests. Presumably, DNA from an undoubted relation of Paine will be needed.

"After The Funeral" by Edwin Murphy (Citadel Press, 1995); Observer, 14 May 2000; Sunday Times, 8 April 2001.

NAZI CHIEF'S SEAL FOUND

The personal seal of the Nazi security chief Ernst Kaltenbrunner has been recovered by chance from the shallows of the Altausee, an Alpine lake in Styria, Austria. Kaltenbrunner was head of the SD, the security section of the SS, and was hanged at Nuremberg for war crimes. He was a friend of Hitler and ensured that the gas chambers worked at full capacity, even as the Third Reich was collapsing.

He is thought to have thrown the seal into the lake in the final days of the war in May 1945. He gave himself up a few miles away to American troops claiming to be a doctor and giving a false name, but his mistress spotted him and called out his real name. She rushed to hug him, accidentally tipping off the troops to his real identity.

The seal found by the 29-year-old Dutch holidaymaker is engraved with the words: "The Head of the Security Police and the SD". In the centre is the Nazi eagle clutching a swastika. For years there have been rumours that the Nazi hierarchy used the lakes to hide gold and other valuables. *D.Telegraph, 16 Nov 2001.*

C'EST LA GUERRE...

"Blimey, she's a big girl!"

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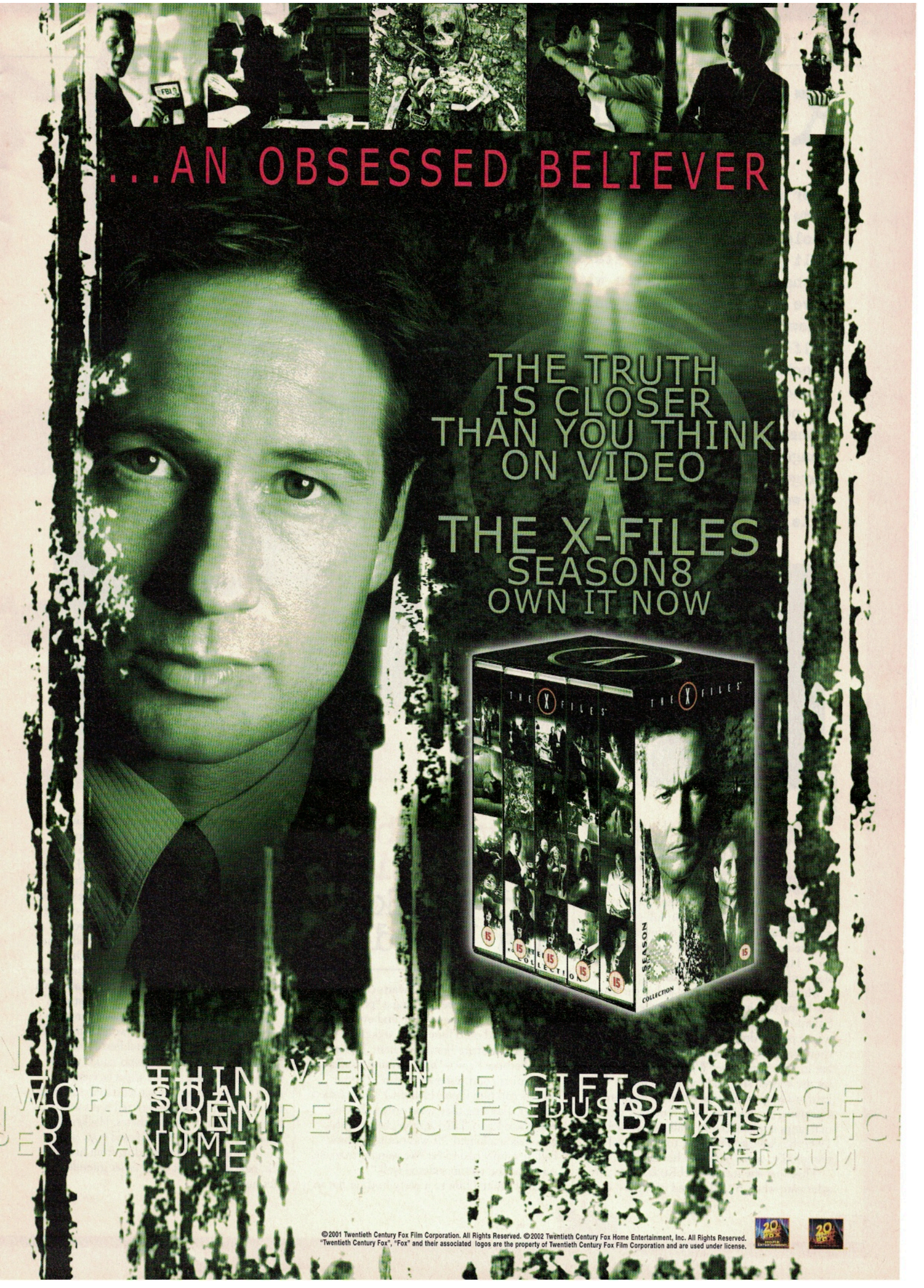
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Killing for Satan

Ever since Charles Manson and his Family made the headlines, murder has been a whole new ball-game, in which Satanic cult trappings, media stardom and anti-authoritarian rebellion without-a-cause have been inextricably entwined.

Now Daniel and Manuela Ruda, a pair of self-proclaimed vampiric Satanists, have shocked the world with their brutal 'ritual killing', tales of demonic possession and courtroom antics.

Whether the Rudas are mad, bad or just dangerous to know, the usual claims of large Satanic networks and more killers-in-waiting have emerged in the wake of this high-profile case.

PA PHOTOS/EPA

AP PHOTOS/MICHAEL SOHN

On 31 January, Daniel Ruda, 26, and his wife Manuela, 23, were found guilty of killing Frank Hackert "for Satan", and were sentenced to 15 and 13 years respectively. Manuela attended the regional court in Bochum, western Germany, in full gothic garb, her head partly shaved to reveal an inverted crucifix and a target tattooed on her skull. Her final gesture was to make a Satanic sign with inch-long black nails.

Manuela ran away to England at the age of 16, living first in London where she met other Satanists and attended vampire "bite parties" where people drank each other's blood. She then went to Scotland and worked in a hotel bar in Kyleakin, Skye. When the hotel closed for the winter, she paid four visits to the Leopard Man of Skye [see panel]. Back in Germany, she had her teeth removed and animal fangs implanted. On Hallowe'en night in 1999 she dedicated her soul to Satan and promised to serve him after her death.

That year she met Daniel Ruda, a car parts salesman, when he advertised in *Metal-Hammer* magazine's lonely-hearts column as a "raven-black vampire" seeking a "princess of darkness who hates everyone and everything". They married on 6 June 2001 and chose Daniel's workmate Frank Hackert, 33, for sacrifice because he was "so funny and would be the perfect court jester for Satan". (Some reports call him Frank Haagen.) They denied murder, claiming they were only following Satan's order to "kill, sacrifice, bring souls". Manuela explained: "It was not something bad. It simply had to be. We wanted to make sure that the victim suffered well."

they stabbed him 66 times and drank his blood

They invited him to a party in their flat in Witten on 6 July 2001. As Ruda hit him on the head with a hammer, his wife shouted "Stab him in the heart!" Manuela saw the light in the flat flicker as Hackert died. "That was the sign that his soul was going down," she said. He was stabbed 66 times. The couple then prayed to Satan, cut a pentagram on the dead man's stomach, drank his blood from a bowl on an altar topped with skulls, and copulated in a silk-lined, oak coffin in which Manuela usually slept. Manuela was disappointed she didn't turn into a vampire, "because as a vampire I would not have needed the streets."

Shortly after the killing, Manuela wrote to her mother: "I am not of this world. I must liberate my soul from the mortal flesh." Her mother alerted the police, who raided the Rudas' flat. Skulls, bloody scalpels, vampire teeth and coloured contact lenses lay scattered around, and the blood-spattered walls were hung with knives and machetes. Hackert's mutilated and party-decomposed body was found with a scalpel protruding from his stomach, near a death list of 15 other intended victims.

FAN

Psychiatric experts claimed that the couple suffered from "severe narcissistic personality disturbances," while Judge Arnjo Kerstingtombroke maintained that the case "was not about Satanism but about a crime committed by two people with severe disorders. Nothing mysterious or cult-like happened here; just simple, base murder." Admirers and supporters of the Rudas were dotted about the courtroom, and the pair had received so much fan mail that Kerstingtombroke added that he was worried by the "limitless stupidity of many members of the public."

Daniel Ruda's lawyer was equally unconvinced by his client's claims of acting under Satanic orders and believed these were simply a cover for his desire for fame: "He says, 'I want to get on stage, I want that everybody knows me… I want to be as famous as Charles Manson and so I have to kill someone.' "

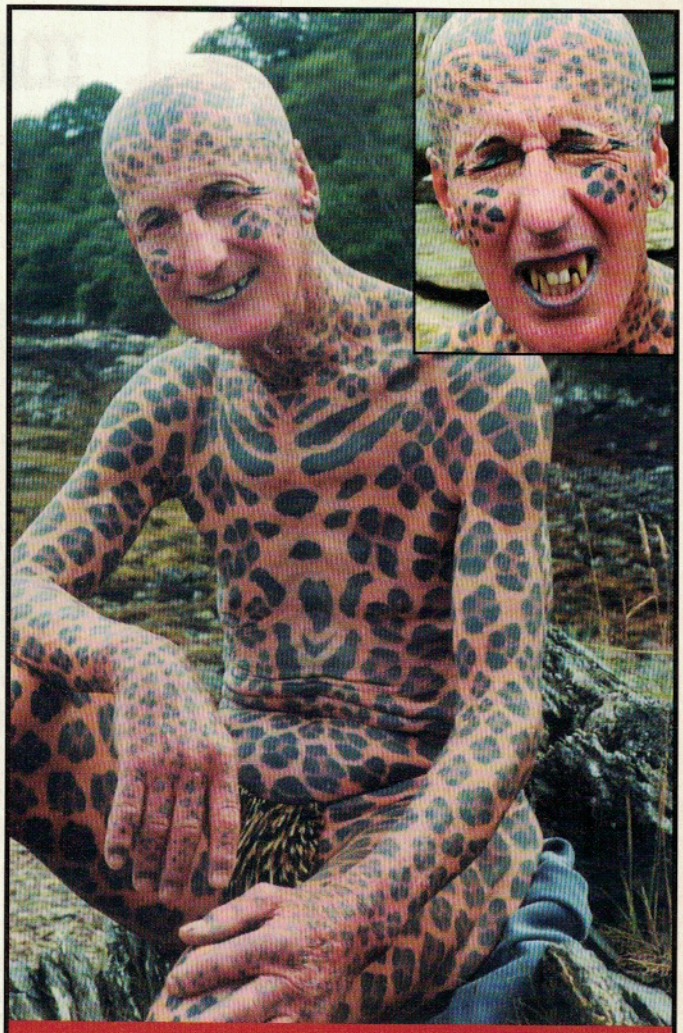
Ingolf Christiansen, who investigates occult groups for the Lutheran church, claims that Satanism has 7,000 adherents in Germany. It first hit the headlines there eight years ago when a 15-year-old member of a group called Satan's Children in the eastern state of Thuringia was strangled by three fellow cult members. On 26 August 2001, three teenage followers of a Satanic cult committed suicide by throwing themselves off the 240ft (73m) high Göltzschtal bridge near Chemnitz in eastern Germany. *D.Telegraph, 28 Aug 2001, 18 Jan, 1 Feb 2002; D.Express, Metro, 18 Jan; Sunday Times, 20 Jan; Scotsman, 21 Jan 2002; Guardian 1 Feb 2002.*

THE VAMPIRES OF ISLINGTON

Manuela Ruda's account of how she drifted into vampirism and Satanism during her time in North London has certainly put the wind up the *Islington Gazette*, whose recent statement that "a secret colony of 'vampires' is operating within Islington's bars and nightclubs" make Tony Blair's old stamping ground sound more like Anne Rice's New Orleans.

There are certainly plenty of London clubs (some, like Slimelight, in Islington) where like-minded Goths can dress up and get together – and it seems a small step to London's vampire scene. This apparently started at Torture Garden nights, originally held in Islington, though blood-letting and drinking were not openly practised. Steve Wilson, a member of the London Vampire Group, told *FT* that while most vampire events are really just fancy-dress affairs, outsiders like Manuela could easily be drawn into more serious activities like sado-masochism and blood-drinking. A search of the internet reveals that such things are commonly practised by many 'vampires'. "I'm not saying that there aren't any blood-drinkers in Islington," said a local Police Constable, "but it's very much an underground scene."

In the US, the vampire subculture appears to be far bigger – an alternative community for alienated youths who see themselves as a tribe or family rejecting (or rejected by) their culture's mainstream. Like all subcultures, this has its own rules, terminology, preferred texts (Anne Rice), lame in-jokes and (of course) schisms (sanguinarians versus psychic vampires). A perusal of the many websites devoted to vampire culture turns up helpful advice on blood-letting, how to deal with 'hunters' and easing migraine (to which your average vampire is, it seems, prone). A dangerous blood-drinking cult in our midst... or trekkies with fangs? *Islington Gazette, 31 Jan 2002.*



GRAMPIAN TELEVISION

THE LEOPARD MAN

Tom Leppard, known as the Leopard Man of Skye, played host to Manuela Ruda in his "cave" built on the foundations of a ruined croft in a remote part of Skye, where he has lived as a hermit for the last 16 years. It is two-and-a-half hour's walk from Kyleakin, the nearest settlement. The ex-colour sergeant in the Rhodesia Regiment, now aged 64, was originally surnamed Woolridge. He was tattooed 16 years ago from head to foot with a leopardskin design, apart from the inside of his ears and between his toes. It cost him £5,500. He also had a set of fangs custom-made by a dentist. According to the *Guinness Book of Records*, he is the world's most tattooed man, with 99.2 per cent cover. His neighbours in Skye regard him as harmless and there is no evidence that he inspired Manuela Ruda to kill.

After her return to Germany, Manuela kept up a correspondence with Leppard, who noticed that her letters became increasingly "crude and hate filled." He told *Sky News* that she was fascinated by his way of life and had told him what she had done in a letter written while she was awaiting trial: "I said you can't just hate, you've got to have something to hate. You can't hate this, or hate without a reason. And she never answered the question."

D.Record, 29 Oct 2001; Aberdeen Press & Journal, 29 Oct 2001, 22 Jan 2002; Scotland on Sunday, Sunday Mail, 20 Jan 2002; Observer, 10 Feb 2002.

the devil made me do it

Recent years have seen an alarming number of so-called 'Satanic murders' or ritual killings. Unlike the Satanic Ritual Abuse panics that gripped both the US and Europe, these cases were substantiated - at least by a trail of mutilated bodies. To Evangelical Christians and others, this is proof of a growing Satanic network. In fact, most murders of this sort are the work of isolated individuals - often young and maladjusted misfits fed on a diet of Black Metal, Anne Rice and other occult pop-culture - who have crossed over from pure fantasy into acting out dreams of limitless power, importance and fame.

BRISBANE, 1989

Tracy Wiggington, 25, her lover Lisa Ptaschinski and two friends were drinking in a gay bar when they planned a random killing to provide blood for Wiggington to drink. Wiggington claimed to be a vampire, avoiding sunlight, living on a diet of pig and goat blood and only going out at night. Ptaschinski had cut open her arms so that Wiggington could drink her blood, and claimed that Wiggington had special powers such as mind-reading and making people vanish.The women posed as prostitutes and picked up an inebriated road worker. They took him to a deserted yacht club where he was stripped and stabbed 15 times with two knives. Wiggington almost severed his head and drank the blood from his neck in a feeding frenzy. At their 1991 trial Wiggington and Ptaschinski were both given life sentences; Kim Jervis was given eight years and Tracey Ann Waugh was acquitted (***FT58:6***).

ATHENS, 1995

Three young Satanists were convicted for the kidnap, rape and murder of a 30-year-old woman and a 15-year-old girl. Asimakis Katsoulos (24) and Manos Dimitrokalis (23), also known by their cult names, Amon and Enigma, were both sentenced to life, while 'high priestess' Dimitra Marieti (22) was given 18 years in prison as an accessory to murder. They had all confessed to leading a 20-strong Satanic cult which conducted human and animal sacrifices over a three-year period.

AP PHOTOS/ARIS SARIS

Dora Syropoulou, 15, was lured to an abandoned winery in August 1992, being handcuffed, raped and strangled. Garufalia Giourga, 30, was kidnapped at a bus stop, raped and tortured and had her skull crushed. Former cult members said Katsoulas had convinced them of his demonic powers by performing miracles - such as producing a snowball in his hand in July.

EUSTIS, FLORIDA, 1996

Rodrick Ferrell, a 16-year-old boy, murdered a middle-aged couple, Richard Werndorf (whose bloody shirt is seen above) and Naoma Queen, with a crowbar. The letter 'V' was burned into Werndorf's body.
After his arrest, Ferrell said that he and three friends, all of whom called themselves vampires, had travelled from Kentucky to Florida after 15-year-old Heather Werndorf had asked them to steal her parents' car and help her run away from home. Werndorf then intended to join Ferrell's band of 'vampires', who apparently engaged in group sex and blood-drinking as part of their rituals. Six hours before the murder, Ferrell and Werndorf sat in a cemetery and drank each other's blood; Werndorf thus became a vampire while Ferrell was fortified for the kill. Three days after the killings, all the 'vampires' were arrested. Ferrell was sentenced to the electric chair in 1998.

WARSAW, 1999

A 19-year-old woman and a 17-year-old man were killed during a Satanic ritual in Southern Poland. Police found their mutilated bodies, cut up and burned, in a disused bunker. They were apparently part of the sect, but had not known that they were to die in the ritual. A third teenage cult member was taken to hospital with multiple knife wounds, while a 19-year-old cultist was arrested in connection with the murders.

BUENOS AIRES, 1999

A 50-year-old man was killed by his two young daughters as part of a Satanic rite. The mutilated body of Juan Carlos Vazquez was discovered at home, along with his daughters, Silvina (21) and Gabriela (29). They had stabbed him 100 times, carved symbols on his body and eaten part of his face. Apparantly all three had belonged to a cult called 'The Alchemy Centre for Transmutation' and had been engaged in a ritual. When police entered the house, the two women were screaming, one invoking Satan while the other proclaimed that Satan had finally left her father's body. A psychologist warned that the strange sect was typical of those gaining more followers in Argentina.

HELSINKI, 1999

A 24-year-old man and a 17-year-old-woman received sentences of life and eight years respectively for the murder of a male friend. The victim died after lengthy torture and, finally, suffocation. The two killers, and a third 20-year-old man, then sexually abused the body and ate parts of it before sawing it into pieces. All three were said to be interested in Satanism and heavy metal music, as was their victim. Authorities suggested that young Finns were becoming increasingly interested in Satanism after a spate of graveyard desecrations.

AP PHOTOS/CHRIS LIVINGSTON

BRISBANE, 1999

Two lesbian teenagers who called themselves 'the AntiChrist' and 'the Angel of Sorrow' stalked a 59-year-old tourist in Noosa National Park before stabbing her 22 times and cutting her throat from ear to ear. Sarah Fotini Bird, 19 and Aleaha Jade Schipper, also 19, had created a fantasy world in which they were Satan's chosen ones with a mission to kill. Bird, who carried out the stabbings, saw Schipper as her 'Satanic devotee' and recorded in her diary that she wanted to be 'feared by everyone'. Amazingly, their victim, Dulcie Brook, survived the attack, even though she had been thrown off a cliff.

LEESBURG, VIRGINIA, 2001

Kyle Hulbert, 18, stabbed biophysicist Robert M Schwartz, 57, to death with a 27-inch (69cm) sword, afterwards drinking his victim's blood in a frenzy. Hulbert believed that Schwartz was trying to murder his own daughter, Hulbert's friend, and that vampires and demons named Ordog, Sabba and Nicodemus had given him permission to carry out the killing. Three other teens, including Schwartz's daughter Clara, are currently awaiting trial for first-degree murder. (***FT156:20***)

MURDEROUS RITES

Ritual murder of children is all too common in some parts of the world; now, with the case of the torso found in the Thames, it has come to London.

FERRAN PAREDES/REUTERS/POPPERFOTO

RITUAL KILLING IN THE THAMES

On 25 January, detectives revealed further evidence in the case of the headless and limbless body of a black boy found in the Thames opposite the Globe Theatre near Tower Bridge on 21 September [*FT155:29*], apparently supporting the view that he was the victim of a ritualistic 'muti' killing, the first in the UK. Thirteen days after the body was found, seven half-burned candles wrapped in a white sheet were found upstream on the southern shore of the Thames near Battersea power station. "Adekoyejo Fola Adeoye" was written three times in blue ink on the sheet (pictured above) and "Fola Adeoye" inscribed on the candles (a name thought to be from the Ivory Coast area). As *Fortean Times* was going to press, police made a further statement eliminating the objects found as evidence in their enquiries. A man named Adekoye Jo Fola Adeoye had been identified and interviewed, who had been the focus of a special prayer ceremony intended to protect him following "recent events in the USA."

Dr Hendrik Scholtz (pictured at left above), a South African pathologist and expert on ritual murder, performed a second post mortem on the body and confirmed that it looked like a muti killing. The Atlas bone, or first vertebra, had been removed. Some Sangomas (witchdoctors) believe this to be the centre of the body, where all nerve and blood vessels meet, and to have unrivalled powers as muti. Such bones sell for £200 in South Africa.

The police named the dead boy Adam, but he has still not been identified, despite a £50,000 reward for information, the highest figure ever offered. They are liaising with detectives in Germany and Belgium, where there are three similar cases involving the murder and mutilation of children whose bodies were disposed of in running water, but they are no longer linking it with the case of a girl whose body was found in Holland. *Times, Guardian, 26 Jan; D.Telegraph, 30 Jan; Ananova 14 Feb 2002.*

MOST VICTIMS WERE POOR AND HAD BEEN RAPED AND CASTRATED

BLACK MAGIC MURDERS

The murdered body of a 10-year-old boy was found on 18 October 2001, in Codo (dubbed the "witchcraft capital of Brazil"), bringing the tally of "Black Magic Murders" in the north-eastern state of Maranhao to 21. The previous victim, 13-year-old Welson Frazao Serra, was found by his father castrated and exsanguinated. All the victims were poor, most were castrated and had been raped, and some had had organs and body parts removed. Candles and chicken blood were found near Serra's body, crucifixes and religious symbols near others. One man was arrested in 1994 and served one year in jail before being paroled; since then, suspects have escaped scot-free because of incompetent and indifferent local policing. The adjacent state, Para, had 26 similar murders between 1989 and 1991.

The murders are being blamed on Macumba, a blanket term for Afro-Brazilian religions practised – alongside Catholicism – by up to one in six Brazilians. Muranhao's Macumba priests are angry that they, rather than devil-worshippers, are being blamed for the murders. The victims' families and human rights organisations are angry that – yet again – Brazil's poor have little access to justice. *Hartford (CT) Courant, 29 Nov 2001.*

CHILD SACRIFICES IN HONDURAS

Police in Honduras are investigating local gangs suspected of kidnapping children for sacrifice in Satanic rites. "We suspect that these groups are not only sacrificing cats and hens but also using children in their rites," said Police Inspector Florencio Oseguera, who heads the gang crime division in Tegucigalpa. He said that in late June police found the decapitated body of a two-year-old boy reported missing by his mother. "The boy had symbols and markings on his body, in women's eyeliner, just like the cats and hens that were found in areas where the gangs are known to have performed Satanic rites," he said.

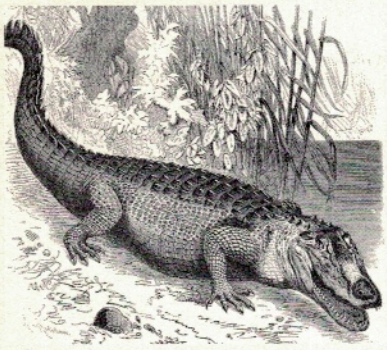
Shortly afterwards, five more boys were reported missing in various towns. The police were investigating one band known as *Los Rockeros* (the Rockers), affiliated with gangs right across Honduras. Police estimate the gangs have as many as 32,000 mostly young members nationwide involved in crimes including assault and murder. *[R] 31 June 2001.*

BARNABAS BOSSHART/CORBIS

THAT OLD BLACK MAGIC: The sheet found by the Thames (top) and a Macumba devotee in ritual costume (left).

classicalcorner 25

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN



OLD CROCS

"What manner of thing is your crocodile?" – Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Fort (*Books*, p592) found three reports (1836, 1862, 1866) of mysterious sightings, all at Over-Norton, Oxfordshire, with jests about "a translatory current especially selective of young crocodiles."

Herodotus (*Histories*, bk2 chs68-70 – the earliest Greek account) is suggestively short on tall stories (none either in Pliny, *Natural History*, bk8 ch37 paras89-94), though his modern editor WG Waddell (1939) calls the given average of 25ft (7.6m) "exaggerated"; Phylarchus (*History*, fr26) has a 40-footer (12m), Aelian (*History of Animals*, bk17 ch6) a pair around 70ft (21m).

Nothing on longevity. In their first *Book Of Lists* (Bantam, New York, 1977, pp133-4), D Wallechinsky/A Wallace/I Wallace put a 56-year-old alligator (no crocs) at 10th place in a tally of long-lived creatures.

Ancient authors and non-literary papyrus texts agree that some Egyptians worshipped crocodiles – feeding, housing, mummifying them. Visiting Roman bigwigs had the privilege of watching them eat. Plutarch (*On Isis and Osiris*, ch72 para380b) says two communities went to war over mutual killings of their sacred reptiles. Others loathed crocs, lured them to shore by the squeals of beaten pigs, and netted them.

Aelian has the best yarns. These "villainous and crafty beasts" cover themselves with driftwood and attack people fetching water from the Nile, also making paths slippery by flooding them and thus grabbing their prey. They lay as many eggs as days needed to hatch them, usually 60. Scorpions are spontaneously generated from dead ones; cf. similar beliefs about bees from deceased lions (OT, Judges, ch14 v8 – immortalised on Tate & Lyle's Golden Syrup tins) or cows (Virgil, *Georgics*, bk4 vv281-314). Predicting the time and height of Nile inundations, they remove their eggs to safety in advance.

One hyper-prophetic croc, knowing that King Ptolemy was about to die, declined to be fed by him. Another carried off the daughter of King Psammetichus; the second *Book Of Lists* (Bantam, New York, 1980, pp108-9) records that on 19 February 1945 crocs killed and consumed 980 of 1,000 Japanese soldiers trapped in a Bay of Bengal swamp.

They were first exhibited at Rome by the aedile Scaurus in 58 BC – perhaps one impetus for the considerable crocodile lore in Cicero's *On The Nature Of The Gods* – and later under Augustus, Domitian, Pius, and Elagabalus.

Pliny (bk28 ch107 para10) recommends crocodile parts as aphrodisiacs, eye-salves, and make-up; Horace (*Epodes*, no12 v11) derides a cosmetically-challenged hag as "swamped in crocodile shit."

Plutarch (*Sagacity of Animals*, para975a) heard of an old dame at Antæopolis who copulated with one – eat your heart out, Linda Kozlowski!

Crocodile tears enter English c.1400 in *The Voyage and Travails Of Sir John Mandeville*, ch28 (with spelling "cockodrill"; cf. Peggoty's "crorkindill" in *David Copperfield*, ch2); then Shakespeare, *Othello*, 4.1.255-7: "...O devil, devil!/If that the earth could team with a woman's tears,/Each drop she falls would prove a crocodile." Francis Grose's *Classical Dictionary Of The Vulgar Tongue* (1785) defines them as "the tears of a hypocrite."

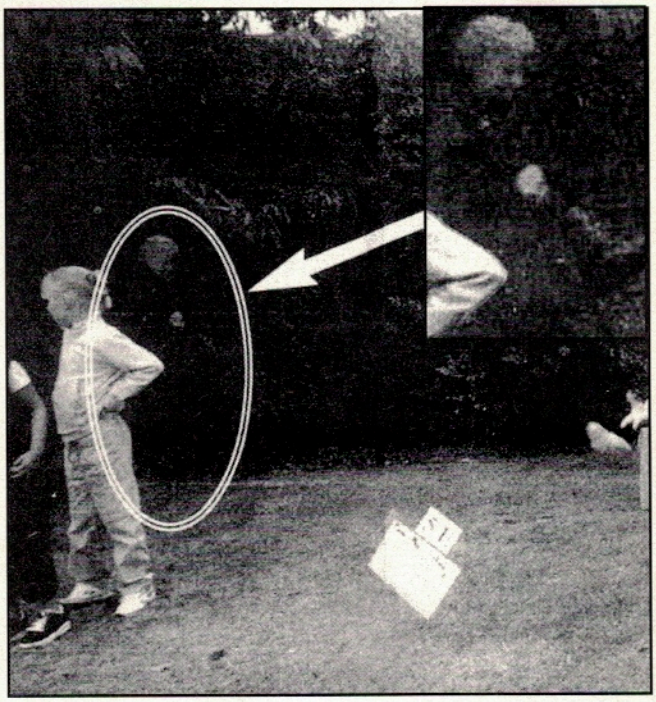
Aelian (bk10 ch21) is the first to mention lachrymosity: they cry when netted and flogged. The fourth-century theologian Asterius (*Homilies*, no14 – reproduced in Photius, *Bibliotheca*, ch217 para503a) avers "crocodiles mourn over the human heads they devour and weep, not from repentance but because heads have no edible flesh." – so, ancient crocs were not hypocrites, just greedy.

"A thing called the crocodile rock" – Elton John

NB: This column complements the reptilian remarks in **FT151:17**. I don't have CA Guggisberg's *Crocodiles: Their Natural History, Folklore, and Conservation* (Stackpole Books, Harrisburg, 1972), mentioned on the internet Crocodile Biology Data Base. Various authors misled by the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* claim Shakespeare invented "alligator" (*Romeo & Juliet*, 5.1.43), but the word's history actually began in 1568.

GHOSTLY TALES

Phantom hitchhiker, barge ghost, bag lady



SARAH COULSON

SPORTS DAY SPOOK: Sarah Coulson's photographic phantom.

Sarah Coulson, 22, attended a sports day at Limbrick Wood Primary School in Tile Hill, Coventry, and took photographs of her seven-year-old nephew, Paul Evans, taking part in events. In one picture, the figure of an old lady dressed in dark clothing and clutching a bag appears in front of a hedge in the background. "The woman definitely wasn't there when I took the shot and she's not in any other of the pictures," said Ms Coulson. Her sister Joanna, 20, said: "I've heard the school site used to be a graveyard, so that may have something to do with it. You can't see the bottom half of the woman and the image seems quite faded compared with other people in the picture. I never saw her there on the day... I definitely think this is a ghost." *Coventry Eve. Telegraph, 5 Sept 2001.*

Last June, Jess East (46) of Scunthorpe, Lincolnshire, who has been a taxi driver for about six years, had a classic "phantom hitchhiker" experience. He picked up a young girl at a lay-by near Keadby Bridge. As she opened the door and got in, he felt a sudden rush of cold and an eerie shiver down his spine. She asked to be dropped at another lay-by, near Glanford Park football ground. Arriving at the destination, he turned round to ask for the £3.95 fare, but she had disappeared.

"I didn't see her get out and the door didn't open," he said. "She was definitely in my car, I am 100 per cent certain. At first I thought she had done a runner, but the door is stiff and there is no way she could have got out." *Scunthorpe Telegraph, 6 July 2001. For other accounts of Phantom Hitchhikers, see* ***FT34:14-16, 73:27-32, 77:56.***

In July, a couple moored their 24ft (7m) narrowboat at Little Baddow, near Grace's Lane, on the Chelmer and Blackwater canal in Essex. During the night, they saw flashing lights and heard tapping and footsteps on the cabin roof. The rushed out to see what was going on, but there was no one there. Thoroughly spooked, they moved their mooring. Ron Abbott, proprietor of Blackwater Boats, later told them the legend of Grace's Ghost, a young woman who drowned in the river a century ago. *Essex Chronicle, 27 July 2001.*

KARL SHUKER'S ALIEN ZOO

This month Dr Karl Shuker puzzles over a virgin birth in the shark world, the return of an extinct woodpecker, the rarest British bird sighting since 1824 and the mystery monster of the Philipines.

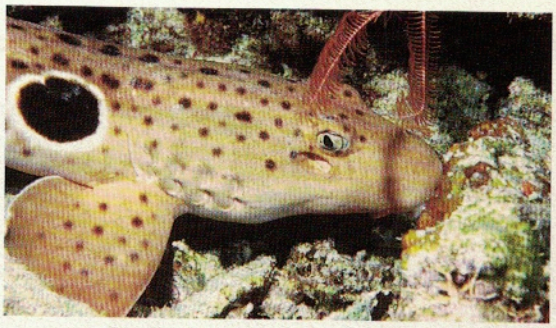
VERGING ON VIRGIN BIRTH?

The three bonnethead sharks *Sphyrna tiburo* currently living in a tank at Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha, Nebraska, have lived there ever since they arrived as 2-3lb (about 1kg) pups three years ago, they are all females and have never shared their tank with a male of their species. Little wonder, then, that scientists there were amazed when, on 14 December 2001, one of them gave birth! Tragically, the shark pup died five hours later after being attacked by a stingray sharing the tank, but DNA tests on tissue and blood samples taken from the pup's body are currently being conducted in an attempt to unmask its father – always assuming that it has one.

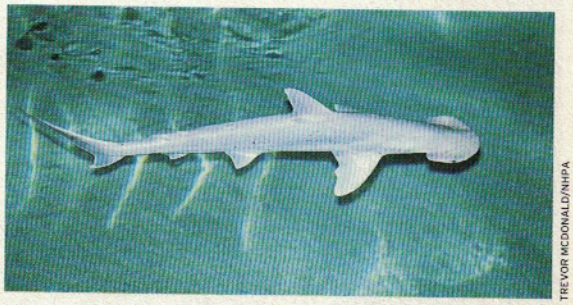
Parthenogenesis (virgin birth), although recorded from a wide range of animals, including turkeys, lizards, and various bony fishes, doesn't seem to have been confirmed in sharks, but zoo director Lee Simmons has not entirely ruled it out in this case.

For the only other answer – equally difficult to conceive (in every sense!) – is that the paternal culprit is a male epaulette shark *Hemiscyllium ocellatum* that lives in the same tank. Yet this small species is not closely related to the much larger, hammerhead-allied bonnethead, and hence is very different genetically, making the prospect of successful hybridisation highly implausible. Moreover, as Simmons notes, a mating between a male epaulette shark and a female bonnethead would correspond physically to "a chihuahua impregnating a Saint Bernard"!

http://sg.news.yahoo.com/reuters/asia-83327.html 12 Jan 2002.

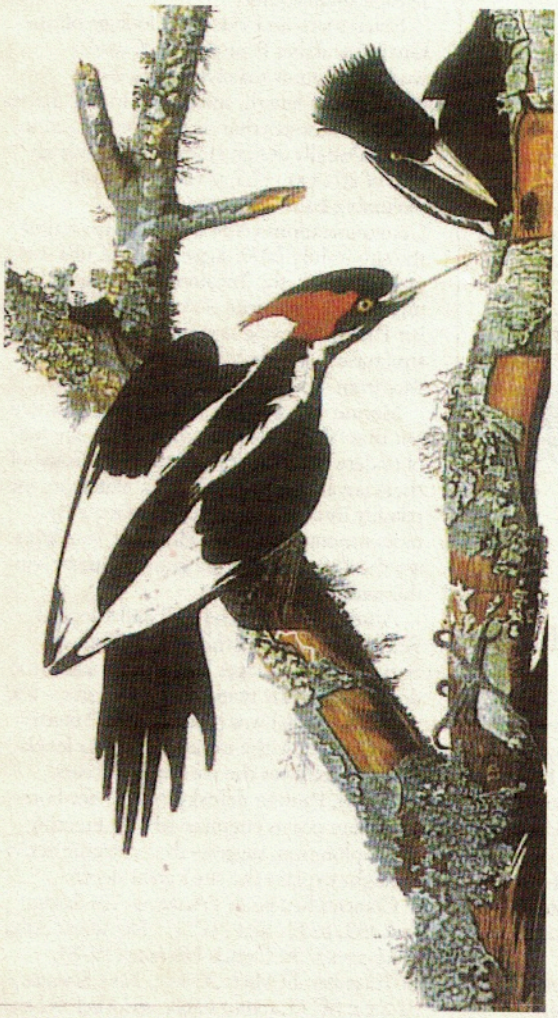


A.N.T./NHPA



TREVOR MCDONALD/NHPA

SHARKING IN: Did a male epaulette shark (top) impregnate a bonnethead shark? (bottom)



J.J.AUDUBON AND R. HAVELL/AUDUBON SOCIETY

RARE BIRD: Ivory-billed woodpeckers as recorded by Audubon.

THE IVORY-BILL

Following on from my earlier 'Alien Zoo' report [***FT139:23***] concerning a convincing but unconfirmed 1999 sighting in southeastern Louisiana of the officially extinct North American ivory-billed woodpecker subspecies, an international team of ornithologists has launched an extensive search for it. Focusing on 35,000 acres of heavily-wooded land in the Pearl River Wildlife Management Area, and beginning on 17 January, the search is due to last 30 days, and involves high-tech video, audio detection, and recording equipment. As noted by one of the expedition's chief organisers, bird curator Dr James Van Remsen Jr from Louisiana State University's Museum of Natural Science, if this bird were indeed rediscovered it would be one of the biggest avian finds in many decades. *Houston Chronicle, 21 Dec 2001.*

A VIP VAGRANT IN BRITAIN

Almost as incredible, but at last confirmed as official after three years of debate, was the sighting back in 1998 of a slender-billed curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* at Druridge Bay in Northumberland. Spied by Tim Cleeves, a Yorkshire-based RSPB conservation officer, who also videoed and photographed it, what makes this report so extraordinary is that the slender-billed curlew is one of the world's rarest bird species, possibly down to as few as 50 specimens globally, and whose nesting site has never been uncovered.

Thus Cleeves's video and photos were scrutinised in meticulous detail by several experts before the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee announced in January 2002 that this critically-endangered species had indeed been accepted onto the official British birds list – making it the rarest bird to be seen in Britain since the great auk, which became extinct in 1844.

Wolverhampton Express and Star, 25 Jan 2002.

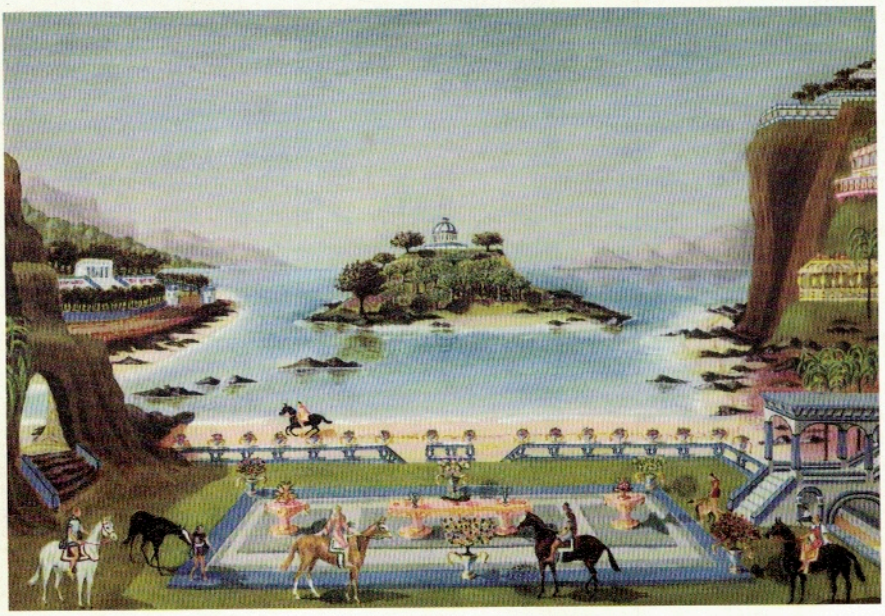
LURKING ON LUZON

Five mysterious water monsters, first sighted on 5 November 2001, are causing consternation among families of the Aeta tribe living in the village of Buhawen, on the Philippine island of Luzon, whose oral history has no mention of such creatures. The monsters have appeared in the Tikis River, are jet black in colour, and elongate in outline. One of them was estimated by eyewitnesses to measure approximately 7ft (2m) long and 3ft (90cm) wide, another was said to be the size of a jeep, but all remain unidentified, as they have never revealed their heads or tails. The villagers are so concerned for their safety that they no longer catch fish in the river, have forbidden their children from bathing there, and are appealing to scientists to visit the area in the hope of solving the mystery of this bizarre quintet.

http://www.inq7.net/nat/2002/jan/14/nat_9-1.htm 14 Jan 2002.

ATLANTIS FOUND?

Two more recent contenders for the 'lost continent'



MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

BEFORE THE FLOOD: A fanciful image from the book *Atlanta, A Story of Atlantis.*

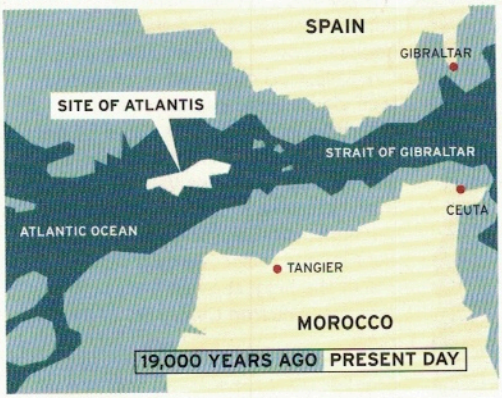
ATLANTIS IDENTIFIED (AGAIN) OFF GIBRALTAR

According to Plato, whose *Timaeus* and *Critias* (c.355 BC) contain the first written descriptions of Atlantis, the lost land lay just beyond the Pillars of Hercules (the Strait of Gibraltar) and disappeared beneath the waves around 9600 BC. He said the famous Greek law-giver Solon had heard the story from the Egyptian priests of Sais around 600 BC. Aristotle thought Atlantis was an allegory rather than a real place, and the majority of scholars have followed this line since.

However, since the 17th century, enthusiasts have looked all over the world for Atlantis – from Spitzbergen to Ceylon, Iraq to the Canaries, Mongolia to Morocco – and recently in Bolivia, the Bahamas and off Land's End. In 1882 Ignatius Donnelly placed Atlantis in the mid-Atlantic, but our knowledge of sea floor spreading and continental drift have fatally weakened his arguments.

But what of Plato's specific location of Atlantis? Professor Jacques Collina-Girard of the University of the Mediterranean in Aix-en-Provence is interested in patterns of human migration from Europe into North Africa at the height of the last Ice Age, 19,000 years ago. To see if Palæolithic people could have crossed the Strait of Gibraltar, he made a map of what the western European coastline looked like at the time, when the sea level was 130 metres (427ft) lower than it is now.

The map revealed an ancient archipelago of seven islands, one of which was just where Plato said Atlantis had been. This island is now a shoal called Spartel or Majuan Bank on the charts. The Strait was longer and narrower than today, and enclosed a harbour-like inland sea that Plato mentions as the setting for Atlantis. Just over 11,000 years ago, the slow rise of post-glacial sea levels accelerated briefly to more than 2 metres (7ft) per century, according to records from coral reefs. This would have swamped the island just when Plato said Atlantis was swamped.



There are problems with this hypothesis. Plato's Atlantis was "larger than Libya and Asia combined", whereas Spartel is 14 by 5km (9 by 3 miles). Collina-Girard employs the old argument that a mistake was made in converting Egyptian units of length into Greek units as the story was passed down. However, it remains hard to believe that the story could have survived by word of mouth for almost nine millennia.

Plato also reports that volcanic activity sank Atlantis, but this may have been embellishment. The Greeks were familiar with volcanic eruptions – to them, such a fate might have been more dramatic and plausible than a change in sea level. Around 1470 BC, a massive volcanic eruption destroyed the island of Thera (Santorini) in the southern Aegean Sea. The idea that this caused tsunamis, the downfall of the Minoan civilisation in Crete, and the story of Atlantis was put forward by the Greek archæologist Spyridos Marinatos in 1939, but the Minoan capital Knossos survived until 1380 BC, long after the eruption – and Plato was emphatic that Atlantis had not been in the Mediterranean.

CARIBBEAN DISCOVERIES

The historian Lewis Spence suggested in 1912 that the West Indies were the remnants of Atlantis. The sea around them is shallow and a much larger land area would have been exposed when the sea level was lower. In 1940 the US clairvoyant Edgar Cayce predicted that "a portion of the temple of Atlantis" would arise off Bimini, a small island in the Bahamas, in 1968 or 1969 – so there was excitement when, in 1968, a fishing guide showed the archæologist Dr J Manson Valentine a curious rock formation off the coast of North Bimini. Two parallel lines of rectangular stones, some 600m (1,968ft) long, lay in 7m (23ft) of water off Paradise Point. However, the geological consensus is that this submerged "road" is a natural simulacrum.

Sonar scans and videotape footage off the Guanahacabibes Peninsula on Cuba's western tip show massive stones, 2–5m (6.5–16ft) in length, submerged in 650 metres (2,130ft) of water that seem to be arrayed in architecturally designed formations over an area of 20 sq km (7.7 sq miles). British Columbia-based Advanced Digital Communications (ADC), which first found the site in July 2000, suggests that Cuba was once joined to the Yucatan Peninsula and might have been part of Atlantis. Team member Paul Weinzweig said that some of the structures resemble Mayan temples and may date from as early as 4000 BC.

Marine archæologist Martin Dean pointed out that "the world's seas and oceans are full of underwater limestone formations. Some of them cover many square miles, which are mistakenly interpreted as sunken cities with monotonous regularity." However, geologists say the Cuban stones are granite rather than the softer limestone.

Alistair Crame, head of the Geological Sciences division of the British Antarctic Survey in Cambridge, claimed the site is too deep to have any man-made structures – 650 metres (2,130ft) was more than 500 metres (1,640ft) below the lowest global sea levels experienced over the past million years. However, Paulina Zelitsky, the Soviet-born Canadian ocean engineer who is directing the exploration, suggests that volcanic activity might explain the site's great depth.

Comptes Rendus de l'Academie des Science (vol 333, p233, Sept 2001); "The World Atlas of Mysteries" by Francis Hitching (1978); D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 20 Sept; New Scientist, 22 Sept; [R] (Toronto) Globe and Mail, 8 Dec; Washington Post, 26 Dec 2001.

SAINTS PRESERVE US...

Incorruptibles continue to baffle scientists while pulling in pilgrims the world over

SPAARNESTAD FOTOARCHIEF

FRISIAN COLD: The 400-year-old mummies of Wieuwerd church; were these mysterious incorruptibles members of the Labadist religious sect?

The Kyivo-Pecherska Lavra (Kiev Cave Monastery) is one of the main places of pilgrimage for the Orthodox faithful in the Ukraine. In open coffins can be seen the bodies of more than 100 monks which have failed to decompose even though they were not prepared for mummification, a mystery investigated by scientists since the 17th century. While the bodies of ordinary people interred in the caves crumbled to dust, those of ascetic monks remain incorrupt and even have a reputation for healing power.

Incorruption is a recognised sign of holiness in various religions. Examples include St Bernadette Soubirous of Lourdes, the Indian yogi Paramahansa Yogananda and Pu Chao, a Buddhist monk in Taiwan who died in 1983.

Recent microbiological research in the Kiev monastery has shown that the oxidation around the open coffins of St Agapit and St Varlaam is two to nine times lower than elsewhere in the monastery caves. Also, the number of microbe colonies within the cups left on the coffins for five minutes was six to seven times lower than average on Agapit's coffin, and 10 times lower on Verlaam's. The most harmful form of pathogenic bacteria, hæmolytic (destroying erythrocytes), disappeared completely from the cups left on the saints' coffins. While the nature of the healing power attributed to the relics may have been identified, its origin remains a mystery. *Ukrainian Observer, 28 Feb 2001.*

Another place of pilgrimage is the 13th century church in Wieuwerd, a Dutch village built on an artificial mound in the middle of the Frisian plains. The crypt contains four incorrupt bodies, nearly 400 years old, in simple wooden coffins with glass lids. The crypt is cold, its walls are over three feet thick and a constant breeze blows through the tiny, unshuttered windows.

"Some think the preservation is due to the circulation of the air; others say strange gases or magnetic emissions are the cause, or blame ley lines," said Wiepie Nouta, one of the guides to the 'Frisian mummies'. "Some people complain of a headache when they leave the crypt or say they can feel a force when they are inside. It is very damp. In winter the water runs through here, and the bodies on the north side are better preserved than on the south." Three desiccated birds hang from the ceiling, the results of experiments in the last century to see whether the crypt can still preserve organic remains.

The crypt was built in 1609 by the wealthy Walta family, and might have been used by the Labadists, an ascetic religious sect which had a large local following. Three daughters of the Walta family were members of the sect, which stressed the importance of manual labour. Wieuwerd was the final European stronghold of the sect, which dispersed in 1732. Eleven coffins were found in the vault when it was reopened by carpenters renovating the church in 1785. Seven were taken away for research and the bodies in them crumbled to dust.

Of the four that remain, one is a girl aged about 14 who died of tuberculosis and one is a man is his 30s who must have died in agony due to the large abscess in his jaw. The crypt attracts some 10,000 visitors a year, providing an important source of income for the village, which has a population of 240. "The most frequent question we are asked is 'Were they put in their coffins naked?'," said Nouta. (The freeze-dried penis of the mummy known as the goldsmith is very much in evidence.) "In fact, the bodies were buried fully dressed, but we don't know what happened to their clothes." *Het Financieele Dagblad (Netherlands), 14 July 2001.*

OUR DEAD MAN IN NIRVANA

The Vietnamese are at present restoring the cracked lacquer on the body of Vu Khac Minh, a 17th century Buddhist monk on show in his pagoda 20 miles from Hanoi. "Radiological examinations... show that all of [the body's] bones and organs are still in the same place as at the moment of death, which makes its preservation for three centuries all the more mysterious," said Professor Nguyen Lan Cuong of the Hanoi Institute of Archaeology.

Thich Thanh Nhung, the head monk at the pagoda, believes Vu's incorruption "illustrates the ability of the body to acquire a new level of grace through Buddhist teachings." As Vu neared his death in 1639, he told his followers to leave him alone for 100 days so that he could meditate. When they eventually went into his pagoda, so the story goes, they found his perfectly preserved corpse still in the lotus position. Believing that he had reached Nirvana, they preserved the body with red lacquer. *Guardian, 13 July 2001.*

FBI BEWITCHING THE ACADEMY

THE OLD GODS ARE RETURNING... AND THIS TIME THEY'VE GOT LIBRARY PASSES. MARK PILKINGTON REPORTS FROM AN ACADEMIC CONFERENCE OF THE INCREDIBLY BROAD CHURCH THAT IS CONTEMPORARY PAGANISM

JOVEN KEREKES

It's Christmas, and thousands of Teenage Witches and pre-teen wizards are enjoying the bounteous fruits of successful spells cast over their parents. But as these would-be Harrys and Sabrinas pore over the books, videos and other assorted gifts of the merchandising gods, something was burning in Alamagordo, New Mexico, not far from the Trinity atom bomb test site, and it wasn't witches. Well, not quite.

"Behind that innocent face is the power of satanic darkness. Harry Potter is the devil and he is destroying people," pastor Jack Brock, of the Christ Community Church, told reporters as the works of JK Rowling burned alongside those of Stephen King, AC/DC, Eminem and even Walt Disney. "These books teach children how they can get into witchcraft and become a witch, wizard or warlock." Brock later admitted that he hadn't actually read any of the books.

Each new generation sees elements of its youth eagerly tuning in to Magic FM, and, unfortunately, this is the response that some of them will always receive. However, 'The Development of Paganism', a day conference organised by Belief Beyond Boundaries, part of the Open University Religious Studies Research Group, was a sure sign of positive change. Not all the speakers were themselves pagan, nor all the audience, but many of them were, and the result was a refreshingly lively, multi-disciplinary and multi-generational approach that almost made academia seem like fun.

DOES 'PAGAN' NOW DESCRIBE SOMETHING AKIN TO LIFESTYLE?

In the lead-up to last year's Census, the UK Pagan Federation called on all pagans to identify themselves as such in the 'Religion' section of the form. Pagan is, indeed, listed amongst the responses given code numbers and, therefore, officially noted. It is number 323, not far from Rationalist (329) and, yes Jedi Knight (896). Once a derogatory Roman term for a civilian and country-dweller, today 'pagan' incorporates dozens of spiritual beliefs such as the classical Wiccas of Gerald Gardner (Gardnerian) and Alex "King of the Witches" Sanders (Alexandrian), Asatru (the Northern European Tradition), Druidry, shamanism, Goddess and Nature worship and a seemingly endless cavalcade of magical orders. All of these can be broken down into finer parts, many of them highly factionalised and some entirely non-compatible. Then there are the spiritual free-wheelers, and those with a healthy interest in nature, stone circles and psychedelic music. Are they all pagans? Having been so successfully reclaimed, does the word now describe something more akin to a lifestyle choice than a spiritual path?

The Pagan Federation identifies the "pagan nature" as one whose adherents "venerate Nature and worship many deities", a description that could also comfortably include both Shinto and Hindu. Jo Pearson, the conference organiser, does not consider herself a pagan, but is very interested in what it means to others: "All the pagans I have spoken to see themselves as following a religion or spirituality, even if this is not clearly defined. In fact, the lack of definition is often attractive. Specific paganisms such as Wicca, Druidry and Heathenism will tend to attract people who are happy to identify with them. Wicca specifically requires initiation, as do some Druid orders. However, there is a growing consumerist/commodified paganism, particularly where Wicca is concerned, which has led some scholars to differentiate between Wicca as initiatory, esoteric, mystery religion and commodified witchcraft of the kind one picks up from 'How To' books. There are also many people who belong to what I call non-aligned paganism – they are pagans but do not belong to any specific pagan tradition."

This kind of non-aligned, or perhaps non-denominational, paganism is clearly visible within the Eco-Pagan movement. Andy Letcher, of King Alfred's College, Winchester, spent several months with road protest groups in the 1990s, where he found a strong undercurrent of magic and paganism. Exemplified by groups like the Donga Tribe at Twyford Down and the broader, less directly confrontational Dragon Environmental Network, eco-paganism incorporates "diverse pagan-like spiritualities" within the protest culture. Practised by both initiates and non-initiates, eco-magicians attempt to channel natural currents – earth energies or "dragon" energies – against those who appear to oppose it, perhaps local councillors, construction workers and their equipment. While much of this will take place on a non-physical level, it might also manifest in the shape of dragon-shaped trenches dug in front of diggers or magically-charged symbols daubed onto trees.

Notions of the sacred landscape and the power of place are fundamental to paganism, and were highlighted by Robert Wallis, a self-professed Heathen archæologist. With the recent reopening of Stonehenge to celebrants at the Summer and Winter Solstices, English Heritage is deliberately vying for, in their words, "an opening-up of pagan and mainstream perspectives to each other." While this is certain-

ly a thawing of their previous position, their claims to ownership of the site still lead to problems. Last year, English Heritage decided that the Winter Solstice fell on 22 December, but the few hundred pagans gathered at the gates on the night of the 21st knew otherwise. After a stand-off of a few hours, security eventually conceded defeat and opened the gates. Such concessions are not entirely altruistic, and English Heritage knows on which side its bread is buttered. Sites such as Stonehenge and Avebury are now regularly referred to as "sacred" on official tourist signs and literature, but sacred to whom? Sanctity for many contemporary pagans is what you make of it – a stone circle built by the BBC in North Wales for their Narnia series is now in regular ritual use. As Wallis states, "sacred sites don't have to be ancient."

Such reverence for nature and landscape is central to many ancient spiritualities, and some Native Americans and Maoris have now begun to refer to themselves as pagan, describing their return to the 'old ways'. But Graham Harvey, of King Alfred's College, Winchester, feels that the new paganism is very much a product of modernity. It's a protestant form of paganism, deity-centred, and highly concerned with morals and ethics. For the many tribes within indigenous groups, the spirits of their ancestors, the landscape and everything in or on it require as much devotion as any deity, while ethical matters are primarily issues of community, rather than religion. Certainly, it's hard to see why the denizens of the spirit world would concern themselves with human morals.

While many of the paganisms popular in the UK and America are largely nature-orientated, Roman neo-paganism is, like its ancestor, very much concerned with matters of family and state. Italy's burgeoning pagan revivalist movement is little known outside of its homeland, and Marco Pasi, of the Sorbonne, provided an intriguing introduction. While pagans here are usually seen as left-leaning fluffy jumper wearers, Italy's staunchly anti-Catholic neo-Roman pagans identify strongly with Mussolini's fascism. In 1913, a group of anti-Catholic Roman revivalists is said to have performed rites found carved on a recently uncovered classical Roman sceptre. The ritual was then performed again after World War One, the intention each time being to overthrow the Pope and return Italy to its former pagan glories. There are even said to be neo-Roman communities deep in the Italian countryside, run according to pagan beliefs and ideals, where they take their toga parties very seriously.

Widening our perspectives on paganism's spread worldwide is an increasingly important part of academia's role in the subject. Jo Pearson is keen for this to develop. "The Wiccan revival has spread not only to the US, Canada, Oz and New Zealand, but also to Germany, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. At present there is a concentration on the national UK scene among UK academics, but I'm involved with European scholars of esotericism and am planning to do a major study of paganism in Europe. Nationals of other countries, like Marco Pasi in Italy, but also people in Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Russia are also studying their paganisms."

PAGANISM IS SEEPING INTO MAINSTREAM CULTURE

Digging at the historical roots of the new paganism is Ronald Hutton, one of the subject's undisputed stars, who near-exhaustively covered the movement's re-emergence in his book *The Triumph of the Moon*. He is currently seeking to plug what he describes as the yawning gap between the end of the ancient pagan world and its rebirth in the 20th century as a very different animal. A key example is how, as we have uncovered its secrets, Nature has transformed from a goat-footed force to be feared and appeased to a goddess to be loved and adored. The trail is broken: clues lie in ideas, images and texts which have been passed down and transformed over time via gateways such as Haran in North Mesopotamia. In the ninth and 10th centuries, this was an important centre for Mediterranean culture and a possible cauldron for the melding of magical traditions from the Arabic, Egyptian and Hellenistic worlds. Several famed astrologers and alchemists emerged from this breeding ground for ideas, and their writings eventually found their way onto the bookshelves of the European intelligentsia and provided at least one path of transmission for some very ancient ideas.

An intriguing notion brought up in a paper by Geoffrey Samuel, of the University of Newcastle, New South Wales, pointed out numerous similarities between Indian Tantric practice and elements of Gerald Gardner's Wicca. Tantra refers to several magical and religious systems, developed over 12 centuries. The key period for Samuel lies between the eighth and 12th centuries, when the concept of the cakra (or chakra) grew in importance. Cakra, essentially, means circle, and in Tantric originally referred to a ritual circle in which participants would sing, dance, eat, drink and channel energies – very much as Gardner's Wiccans did. There's also a heavy focus on female power, and a sexually-charged aspect to both sets of practices. Gardner may have encountered Tantric ideas when he lived in Ceylon/Sri Lanka, Borneo and Malaysia, but they had also been imported to England from India in somewhat sanitised form by writers such as Hargrave Jennings, Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe) and, more diffusely, via Theosophy. The more explicitly sexual components manifested in the techniques of magical orders such as the German Ordo Templi Orientis, as well as late 19th century gentlemen's erotica. Certainly there were a number of possible channels for this Tantric influence, and it's ironic to think that Wicca, so concerned with self-empowerment and personal freedom, should have arisen out of England's colonial legacy.

Nick Freeman, of the University of the West of England, highlighted another interesting stream of influence – that of Victorian and Edwardian supernatural writers such as Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, MR James, Saki (HH Munro) and others. While Blackwood and Machen were sometime members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, MR James once catalogued Trinity College Cambridge's collection of John Dee's works and Machen catalogued occult books for Blackwell's bookshop, most of them weren't pagans or mystics. They skilfully tapped a good vein of source material in the ideas of the then abundant mystical groups and the resurgence of interest in ancient cultures, later characterised by JG Frazer's 1922 epic *The Golden Bough*. Machen's and Blackwood's tales, particularly, revel in nature as an almost intelligent force, and the strange ecstasies of pagan revels. Freeman considers that these authors' greatest impact was probably on a later generation of young, soon-to-be pagans and occultists, when they were reprinted in the 1970s in paperback collections with eye-popping covers and titles like *The Magicians* and *The Necromancers*.

Gazing into the crystal ball, we see that things are certainly changing, within academia and in the real world. All the speakers agreed that such a conference would have been nearly impossible to organise even 10 years ago, but as pagan motifs and ideas become an ever-more visible part of mainstream culture, it's going to be increasingly difficult for academia to ignore them. As Andy Letcher says: "The academic study of paganism is marginal, but paganism itself isn't – it's seeping into mainstream culture." While the book burnings will inevitably continue, there are sure signs of change. At the time of writing this piece Vivienne Crowley, who spoke at the conference on Jung and Wicca, has been offered a position teaching the psychology of religion at a Jesuit college in North London.

Now that's magic!

RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED SURFING

http://www.paganfed.demon.co.uk/
Pagan Federation

http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/relstud/bbb/
Belief Beyond Boundaries

RECOMMENDED READING

Ronald Hutton
The Triumph of the Moon (1999)

JOVEN KEREKES

MORE BEASTLY BEHAVIOUR

CIA spy cats, plague of the zebra mussels and white elephant bodes well for Burma

CHRIS GARBUTT

ACOUSTIC KITTY

Newly released documents from the CIA's ultra-secret Science and Technology Directorate reveal that the CIA attempted to employ cats and birds for intelligence collection during the Cold War. In one experiment known as Project Acoustic Kitty, a cat was wired up so that it could listen to secret conversations from window sills, park benches or dustbins. "They slit the cat open, put batteries in him, wired him up," said Victor Marchetti, a former CIA officer. "The tail was used as an antenna. They made a monstrosity. They tested him and tested him. They found he would walk off the job when he got hungry, so they put a wire in to override that."

At the first live trial in 1966, Acoustic Kitty was driven to a park in a surveillance van and let out, whereupon he was promptly run over by a taxi. "There they were," said Marchetti, "sitting in the van with all those dials, and the cat was dead." The project took five years to design and is thought to have cost more than £10 million. Curiously, 1966 saw the release of a British film called *Spy With a Cold Nose*, which featured a dog wired up to eavesdrop on the Russians. *BBC History, Nov; Sunday Telegraph, 4 Nov 2001.*

ZEBRA CROSSINGS

The Shannon waterway in Ireland is plagued with zebra mussels, and up to two billion have infested Lough Key. The mussels eat phytoplankton, the green pigment of which was once used to measure the degree of water pollution in lakes; however, it is not clear whether the level of phosphates (from fertilisers and detergents) are affected. Though the water is now clearer, that in itself may cause more problems: more plants may grow and the insect hatches on which the fish feed may suffer.

The mussels have already wreaked havoc in the Great Lakes, where tens of millions of dollars have been spent annually since the 1980s to try and eradicate them, and are making in-roads in the Mississippi. Purdue University researchers may have come up with a solution: extremely low-frequency electromagnetic waves, which cause an ion imbalance in the mussels but seem harmless to other mussels and fish. The Mississippi already had problems: many native species were destroyed when carp were introduced to control weeds. A proposal to introduce the Asian black carp – they eat the yellow grubs (spread by other mussels) which kill farmed fish – are causing ructions. The introduction of Nile perch into Lake Victoria was disastrous for the wildlife – and economy – of the area, and a similar situation could arise in the Mississippi.

An algae invasion is also threatening California. The fern-like *Caulerpa taxifolia*, which was developed to decorate large aquaria, escaped from the Oceanographic Museum in Monaco and overwhelmed swathes of marine habitat. It spreads rapidly and gives off poisons which wipe out small marine organisms. It turned up in the environmentally-sensitive Agua Hedionda Lagoon, near San Diego, and is being nuked with chlorine and copper sulphate herbicides...

Meanwhile, the South American Water Hyacinth, which doubles in volume in 12 days, has now choked waterways and killed fish in over 50 countries... And on dry land, the brown tree snake has rid Guam of most of its native birds and is continuing its dastardly work in Hawaii, Spain and the US. *Independent, 8 July, 9 Nov 2000; Int. Herald Tribune, 21 May; Metro, 23 May; Business Week, 17 Sept; Irish Times, 19 Oct 2001.*

WHITE ELEPHANT

The world's second true white elephant – an eight-year-old bull – was caught in Rakhine state, western Burma, last October; the other one, which lives in Laos, is poorly. Thailand claims to have 12 (one of which lives in the king's palace), but they do not have the pearl eyes, white hoofs and white hair of the true – and highly-prized – albino.

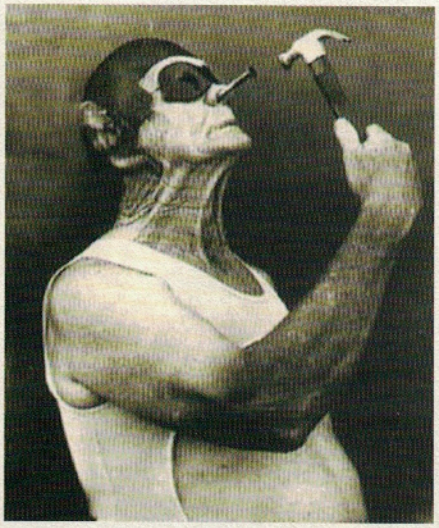
White elephants were the symbol of kingship in South-East Asia and supposedly brought rulers great fortune; the crushing financial burden of keeping them in splendour was the origin of the term 'white elephant' for something beautiful but totally useless. The *New Light*, the organ of the military junta, promptly declared, in a full-page report, that it augured well for Burma's prosperity. *[AP, AFP] 9 Nov 2001.*

STOP PRESS: MARJAN RIP

Marjan (or Marjon), the one-eyed lion of Kabul Zoo, died peacefully of old age on 26 January. He was thought to be between 25 and 38 years old (not 45 as our last report stated, quoting the *Sun*). In the wild, lions seldom live longer than eight to 10 years. The provisional government were said to be discussing a funeral for Marjan, and a campaign might be launched to build a commemorative statue. A wildlife park near Beijing plans to donate a young replacement lion as a goodwill gesture. *D.Telegraph, 27 Jan; Sunday Telegraph, 3 Feb 2002.*

NECROLOG: INTO THE BLACK

Paul Sieveking rounds up another batch of recent departees from spaceship Earth



MELVIN BURKHART

Dubbed by Ripley's "Believe It Or Not" as the Human Blockhead because he could drive a 5in (13cm) nail or an ice-pick into his head without flinching, Clarence Melvin Burkhart died from a stroke last November. As the Anatomical Wonder, he could inflate one lung at a time and dislocate his shoulders; as the Man Without a Stomach, he could suck his stomach back to his spine; as the Two-Faced Man, he could frown with half his face and smile with the other half. Among many other accomplishments, he swallowed swords, threw knives, wrestled snakes and ate fire. He was universally admired by his fellow performers, one of whom observed: "Anyone who has ever hammered a nail into his nose owes a large debt to Melvin Burkhart."

As a young man in Louisville, Kentucky, Burkhart had wanted to be a prize fighter, but after losing six fights and winning none, he had to have an operation to remove 22 pieces of bone from his nose. This cleared out a small passage into his cranial cavity into which he discovered he could stick a nail. He immediately ran away and joined the circus.

In his 60-year career, he travelled to more than 100,000 sideshows and clocked up more than 900,000 miles (1,448,000km) on the road. He often acted as compere to his fellow performers, introducing such wonders as Cuckoo the Bird Girl, the Seal Boy (who had hands growing out of his shoulders), the Monkey Woman (who was covered in thick black hair and had a double upper row of teeth), and the Amazing Petrified Man. "No freak was a freak to me," he said. "They were my friends, and we were all freaks together. I tried to be their shield against the world."

He was particularly proud of bringing together William Durks, the Two-Faced Man, who suffered from a cleft mouth, split nose and third "eye", with Mildred the Alligator Girl, whose rare skin condition gave her a reptilian appearance. They were happily married for six years before Durks' death.

Burkhart met his first wife Maria in Havana and turned her into what he called "a damned good sword swallower". He is survived by his second wife Joyce and by their three children. As freak shows went out of fashion in the 1960s, he became a magician and children's entertainer, specialising in traditional tricks with dice, rigged cards and disappearing coins. He retired in 1997. He was the last of the legends living in Gibsonton, Florida, or "Gibtown", once the home of the legless Half Girl, the pincer-handed Lobster Boy, the scaly-skinned Frog Man and the bearded Dog-Faced Lady.

Sideshow performer, born Atlanta, Georgia, 16 Feb 1907, died Tampa Bay area of Florida, 8 Nov 2001, aged 94.

DOM GREGORY BRUSEY

The Benedictine monk Gregory Brusey achieved a curious fame in his later life after he witnessed the Loch Ness Monster in October 1971. Walking in the grounds of the monastery at Fort Augustus, beside the loch, he and a friend noticed a commotion in the water about 300 yards (274m) offshore. "We saw quite distinctly the neck of the beast standing out of the water to a height of about 10ft [3m]," he recalled for a TV documentary. "It swam towards us... and, after about 20 seconds, disappeared. It gave us a feeling of something from another world." A quiet man, he was taken aback by the subsequent media interest and regretted 'going public'. "We ought to leave the monster alone. I am a champion of the unknown."

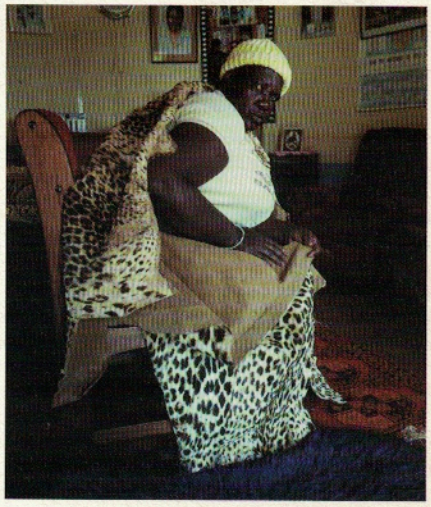
Brusey was educated at Fort Augustus Abbey School and became a fine pianist, organist and violinist. As soon as he left school in 1931, he joined the monastery as a novitiate, spending many years studying music and theology at various institutions. He was ordained in 1941, thereafter devoting his time to the Fort Augustus community between a number of teaching posts. When the Benedictines closed their lochside monastery in 1999, Dom Gregory went to live at Ampleforth Abbey, near York.

English Benedictine monk, born London, 30 Dec 1912, died Ampleforth, Yorks, 30 Mar 2001, aged 88.

QUEEN MODJADJI V

Modjadji V, queen of the Bolobedu, a small matriarchal tribe in the arid northern province of South Africa, died last year of heart and renal failure, shortly after a solar eclipse. She was the great-granddaughter of Modjadji II, who starred in Ryder Haggard's novel *She* as the Rain Queen, "she who must be obeyed". The Bolobedu queens are believed to be oracles and able to will the death of anyone who displeased them. They were also said to have magical powers, including the ability to transform clouds into rain and deter invaders, which has helped to preserve the immense cycad forest in which the tribe lives in the foothills of the Drakensberg Mountains. The Bolobedu were never attacked by the Zulu and Swazi nations, who were unwilling to risk being punished with drought. Their chiefs would travel great distances to consult the august queens, a tradition maintained by Field Marshall Jan Smuts, PW Botha and FW de Klerk.

The queens are said to be descended from a princess who fled Zimbabwe 400 years ago after falling pregnant by her brother, taking with her rainmaking medicine stolen from her father. Two hundred years ago, a descendant, Mugodo, had a vision in which ghosts told him he must marry his daughter and found a female dynasty. He did so, after strangling their first offspring, who was male. Old texts suggest the rain-making ceremony includes water in which the body of a dead queen has been steeped for several weeks.



DANIEL LAINÉ/CORBIS

Modjadji V succeeded her mother in 1982. Nelson Mandela visited her several times and she asked for a road to the cave where she practised her rainmaking rites. Mandela said he would do what he could, and meanwhile gave her two cars. Could she really produce rain to order? Of course, she told a sceptical interviewer on television. Her appearance was followed by a downpour which ended a long spell of dry weather. On the day she died, Johannesburg was struck with unseasonable and heavy rains that continued the next day. Three days before her death, her daughter Makhaele passed away aged 37. The succession was expected to pass to one of the dead queen's granddaughters, the favourite being 23-year-old Makobo, the first Modjadji ruler to have gone to school.

Rain-making monarch, born 1937, died Pietersburg, South Africa, 28 June 2001, aged 64.

MYTHCONCEPTIONS 45

BY MAT COWARD

ILLUSTRATIONS: HUNT EMERSON

THE MYTH

Quicksand is an evil type of sand which lurks in jungles and other unexplored locales. If you step into it, you will inexorably be sucked into its infinite depths, until finally your twitching hand disappears beneath the gloop. It's especially dangerous if you're playing a non-speaking part in a 1940s film about escaped convicts.

THE "TRUTH"

Quicksand is a phenomenon, not a type of soil, which can form in any ordinary sand, clay, or silt. It's usually soil that has become saturated by upward flowing water. The particles lose their friction, so the sand behaves like a viscous liquid when disturbed. It's found in many places, but – *pace* Hollywood – never in a desert. Quicksand patches are rarely more than waist-deep. It doesn't "suck you down" any more than a body of water does. In fact, because it is more buoyant than water, it's easier to float or swim in – provided you don't struggle.

DISCLAIMER Having said all that, several contributions to newscientist.com's questions and answers site warn of a "myth within a myth"; there is a real danger, they say, of a person sinking before rising again, in slow motion, and drowning during the interim. Readers with information to add should write in – but remember, it's rude to talk with your mouth full.

SOURCES There's lots of detailed stuff on the net, including howstuffworks.com; dellamente.com; *Sink or swim in quicksand?* by Kathy Wollard at greenapple.com; and education.eth.net/enrich.

MYTHCHASER

Years ago, a news photographer told me he always carried a ragdoll or a child's plimsoll in his camera bag to give that finishing touch to disaster snaps. Cynical fact, or too bad to be true? If you can put us in the picture, please contact *FT*'s darkroom.

FROM DENNIS TO MENACE

After 20 years and £100,000, ex-geek Dennis Smith, 43, is getting closer to his goal of looking like a tiger. Smith is tattooed with orange and black tiger stripes, his teeth and nails are filed to points, he has surgically implanted latex whiskers, and his lips have been altered into a permanent snarl. Green contact lenses and an orange mane have replaced the specs and short-back-and-sides. The next step is to have tiger skin – he has a collection of old pelts – grafted on, which will, he estimates, cost him an additional £65,000... if he can find a surgeon to perform the operation. Catman – he changed his name by deed poll – graduated from the University of California with a first-class degree and holds down a £80,000 programming job which funds his transmogrification. *Ananova, D.Record, D.Star, 2 Aug; Computer Weekly, 9 Aug; Aberdeen Press & Journal, D.Record, 29 Oct 2001.*

STRANGE DEATHS

A COMPENDIUM OF MACABRE DEPARTURES FROM THIS EARTH

TERRY COLON

BETTY BUNCE, 64, DRANK HERSELF TO DEATH – on water. She became hysterical, but didn't want to speak to a doctor who was called to see her. The friends with whom she and her husband Peter were staying said that they considered turning off the supply to their house in Dawlish, Devon, to stop her getting any more water. Her husband, who lives in Hitchin, Hertfordshire, told a Teignmouth inquest: "She drank dozens of glasses. She then brought it up and drank more. It was quite irrational behaviour." He said she had been losing weight and was possibly suffering from a depressive illness. The water brought on hyponatræmia – low sodium levels in her blood – and she suffered an electrolyte disturbance from acute water intoxication. *D.Telegraph, Western Morning News, 13 Nov 2001.*

A 14-YEAR-OLD BOY TRYING TO MAKE his role in a haunted hayride scarier accidentally hanged himself in front of a group of people who thought he was acting. Caleb Rebh's post at the ride at Alpine Ridge Farms in Sparta, Michigan, included a skeleton hanging by a noose in a nearby tree, but he felt awkward simply jumping out of the woods to scare passers-by. He apparently spoke with other teenagers working at the event about replacing the skeleton with himself. He put the noose around his neck, believing he was safe as his feet were touching the ground, but the branch sprung up and he choked to death. *[AP] 22 Oct 2001.*

KATHERINE MARY KNIGHT, 45, HAS BEEN jailed for life without parole for murdering her common law husband John Price, 44, after he asked her to move out of his house in Aberdeen, New South Wales. Knight, an abattoir worker, stabbed him 37 times on Leap Day 2000.

She then decapitated and skinned his body, hung the complete pelt from a meat hook in the living room, put his head in a cooking pot, and baked flesh sliced from his buttocks. The human steaks were then arranged on plates with gravy and cooked vegetables and left as meals for the son and daughter of the deceased accompanied by vindictive notes. *[AFP] Yorkshire Post, 9 Nov 2001.*

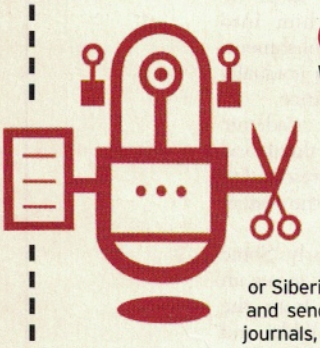
A MAN OF 84 CONFESSED TO KILLING HIS wife because she made him a "disgusting" cup of coffee. He smashed the cup on the floor after taking a few sips, then hit his wife with a hammer. The 72-year-old woman's body was found by a neighbour in Bari, Italy. *Metro, 16 Oct 2001.*

ONE MAN WAS KILLED AND ANOTHER wounded in the Philippines last November when a fight broke out at a karaoke bar in Manila over the quality of the singing. Many karaoke clubs in the country have already removed Frank Sinatra's 'My Way' from their playlists because so many fights broke out as the song was being performed.

Six people have been shot dead in Thailand since 1989 while fighting over possession of karaoke microphones. In 2000, Thai policeman Jirawat Sangworn, 25, shot and killed one man and wounded a friend. He was about to sing the same song for the third time when the pair began heckling. The latest victim was village headman Pichet Iamfuang, 37, who was killed on 9 July last year. *Scotsman, 11 July; Sunday Times, 25 Nov 2001.*

IRWIN ROSE NEVER LEFT HIS TINY FLAT in New York in 13 years. He had sausage and eggs sent up three times a day by a local café and delivery men were his only visitors. However, it wasn't high cloresterol that killed him. Police found his naked body in his bath surrounded by pill bottles. Mr Rose, in his 50s, was thought to deal in shares, but police found no evidence of this, and no ID of any kind. Sun, 4 Aug 2001.

CHARLES WILLIAMS, 59, WAS FOUND dead in the bedroom of his house in Kensington, Liverpool, wearing a large dog chain and collar. He was known for his eccentric manner and often wore large hats, a heavy dog collar and two sets of clothes, even in the summer. Pathologist Dr Alan Williams found that he had ingested 26 5p coins, five 1p coins, 14 safety pins and 200 air rifle pellets. Death was caused by peritonitis due to perforation of the stomach after ingestion of foreign bodies. Liverpool Echo, 31 Oct 2001.



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To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Ideally, send them flat in an A4 stiff envelope. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. **To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: 11 Aug 2001.** If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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Mercurial magician

Paracelsus was a genuine Renaissance man – alchemist, scientist, medical visionary and proto-fortean – **DAVID HAMBLING** assesses the life and legacy of this self-proclaimed 'monarch of all the arts'.

"The Monarchy of all the Arts has been conferred on me, Paracelsus, Prince of Philosophy and Medicine. For this purpose I have been chosen by God to blot out all the phantasies of elaborate and false works, of delusive and presumptuous words, be they the words of Aristotle, Galen, Avicenna or any among their followers."

This was the manifesto of Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim (1493-1541), otherwise known as Paracelsus. A big man with a bigger ego, his overbearing manner and foul mouth made him enemies everywhere. But beneath the bombast he was one of the most brilliant physicians, scientists and alchemists of the Renaissance.

HE DESPISED CLASSICAL AUTHORITIES AND REVERED FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE

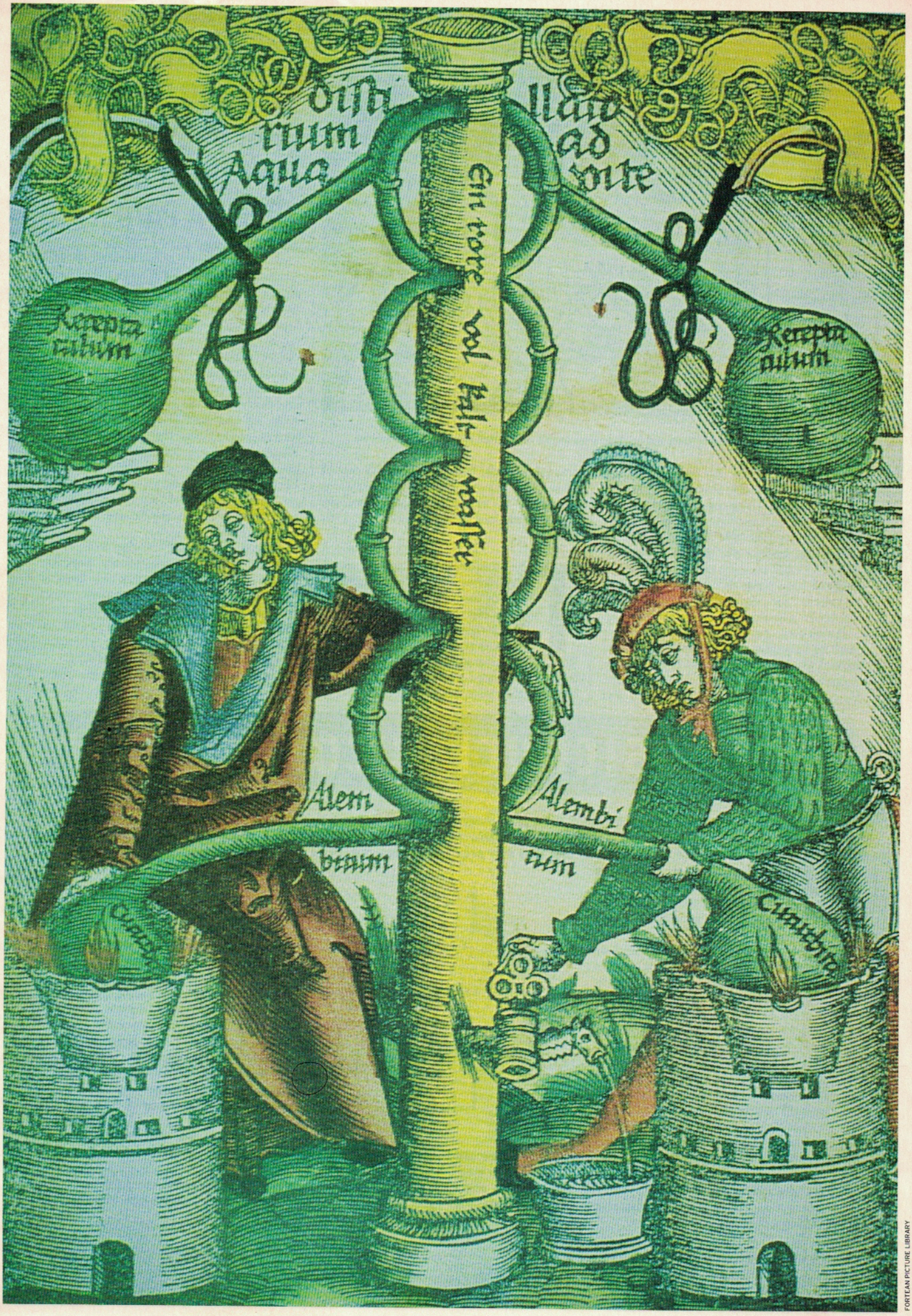
Paracelsus was a true fortean. He despised the classical authorities and revered instead the 'book of the world' which can only be read by walking through it, one page per country, and seeing everything firsthand. What he found repeatedly brought him into conflict with the medical establishment. Rejected at first, he has been gradually winning scientists over ever since.

PARACELSUS COURTESY OF FORTEAN PICTURE LIBRARY

Renaissance medicine was rigidly divided: academic physicians at the top, apothecaries beneath them and barber-surgeons at the lowest level. Poor people resorted to wise women and herbalists, who were outside the system and marginalised by the law.

Physicians tended to be genteel and scholarly. Some were so exalted that they never left their books to see an actual patient. They drew their knowledge from the ancient authorities, who were held to be infallible, and new observations or data were ignored if they contradicted established teaching. They stuck rigidly to Galen's theory that an imbalance in the body's four humours was the cause of all disease, and treatment consisted of restoring the balance. This was an unpleasant process involving bleeding, purging, sweating or inducing vomiting. Patients frequently died, a result blamed on the violence of the sickness. Paracelsus, though, rejected Galen, and insisted that diseases had external causes with a different 'poison' causing each type of disease.

Apothecaries were the forerunners of chemists, mixing combinations of herbal simples to make medicine. Paracelsus took a different approach. He identified the active ingredient in each remedy so that it could be extracted, purified and given in a controlled dose. He dissolved opium in alcohol and called the result laudanum;



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TOP OF THE HEAP: Physicians (left) and apothecaries (right) dominated Renaissence medicine.

for centuries it was the most effective painkiller available. He attacked the trade in imported guiaic (from tree bark) from the New World, an expensive and useless treatment for syphilis. He claimed to have successfully treated the disease with small doses of a toxic mercury compound, but few believed him. Some 400 years later, a new treatment for syphilis was developed: Salvarsan, a toxic compound of arsenic.

Barber-surgeons, at the bottom of this medical heirarchy, carried out bleeding and treated wounds. Their approach was to cauterise with hot oil or brands, or to amputate. By contrast, Paracelsus simply cleaned and drained wounds, believing that this would allow the body's own healing ability to work. In spite of his impressive success rate, this approach did not catch on until the 19th century.

SOME PHYSICIANS WERE SO EXALTED THAT THEY NEVER LEFT THEIR BOOKS TO SEE A PATIENT

The source of Paracelsus' many discoveries was his willingness to go out into the world to find the truth. His travelled from his native Switzerland to Arabia and Scandinavia, from Ireland in the West to the Russian Steppe in the East. He learned advanced techniques from Arab chemists that were completely unknown to western scholars. In every town and city, he sought people from whom he could learn – not academics but those with practical knowledge. "A doctor must seek out old wives, gypsies, sorcerers, wandering tribes, old robbers and other such outlaws and take lessons from them." [1]

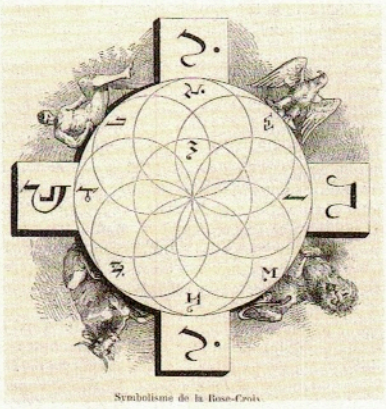
He believed in experience, observation and experiment. As a result, he was the first to record that inhaled dust, and not subterranean spirits, was the cause of miners' diseases. He also realised that problems with drinking water were responsible for goitre. He took the radical stance that insanity was an illness, not the effect of demonic possession, and that the insane should be treated kindly.

A keen alchemist, Paracelsus insisted the true aim of alchemy was not the manufacture of gold but the making of new kinds of medicine. He developed treatments using antinomy, sulphur, mercury and potassium salts. The London Pharmacopoeia took up his method for naming new chemical compounds based on their components.

Such successes, though, were rare. Although he wrote many books, his

THE ROSICRUCIAN CONNECTION

Although shunned by the establishment, Paracelsus always had followers. Among these were the Rosicrucians, a group so secret that it is not certain that they ever even existed. Although reputedly dating back to the 15th century, they first became known to the world in 1614 in a series of anonymous pamphlets. These attacked the Catholic church and described the secret brotherhood of the Rosicrucians, skilled in science and medicine and dedicated to helping mankind. The tracts invited like-minded readers to join the brotherhood, but gave no details of who or where they were. In 1623, they caused a sensation in Paris by posting notices announcing the presence of the 'invisible college' of the Rosicrucians in the city; again contact details were lacking.



Symbolisme de la Rose-Croix

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The members of the order were to follow in Paracelsus' footsteps and become wandering physicians, treating the poor for free and increasing the store of human knowledge. They were to meet secretly, identifying themselves with the sign of a rose and a cross. It is probably not a coincidence that these are the emblems of Martin Luther.

Some of the Rosicrucian tracts were traced to Johnannes Andreae, a German Lutheran writer who admitted to writing them as a hoax. This may be true, or it may be a Rosicrucian attempt at concealment. Certainly the Catholic Church has used the claim to discredit the Protestant Rosicrucians. Others say that Andreae was part of something larger, and that the Rosicrucians were a tremendously powerful secret society.

Real or not, the Rosicrucians inspired Sir Thomas Gresham to set up an English 'invisible college' by sponsoring regular meetings of the eminent scientists of the day. In time, the group attracted the patronage of James I and became the Royal Society. Thoroughly respectable, the Society kept quiet about the more questionable activities of its members. In 1697, the Society's president was a man who devoted more time to his alchemical and occult researches than to science, though few knew about this aspect of Sir Isaac Newton's studies.

Having learned the value of secrecy and circumspection, his successors have enjoyed more public success and influence than Paracelsus himself.

attempts to get published were usually thwarted. Imagine a writer, unsupported by any respectable scientist, who claimed that Einstein and Newton were wrong, and that the entire pharmaceutical industry was a blatant fraud. This, essentially, was Paracelsus' position. To make matters worse, he roundly abused anyone who disagreed with him, publicly calling them "ignorant cabbages", "sausage stuffers", "high asses" and worse. No wonder he attracted little sympathy among his peers.

To the ordinary people, though, he was something of a hero. He preferred taverns to libraries, and was known to take on all comers in drinking contests – and to win. He saw patients from every social class, applying a Robin Hood scale of charges so the rich paid exorbitantly and the poor were treated for free. When hounded out of his one university post, he cheerfully adopted the life of a wandering doctor.

In 1541, he was offered a new post by Duke Ernst of Bavaria, but within the year he was found dead at a Salzburg inn. One story says he was killed in a brawl, another that he was poisoned by his enemies. Yet another version suggests that he died of a heart condition, having made his will out some days earlier.

Death was by no means the end. Many of his works were eventually published by his

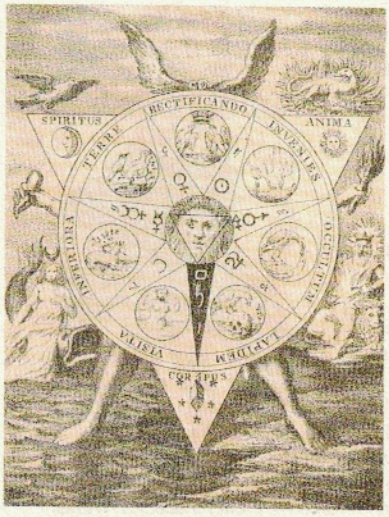
HE ABUSED THOSE WHO DISAGREED WITH HIM, CALLING THEM CABBAGES AND HIGH-ASSES

supporters. General acceptance came later – sometimes much later. His stream of boastful and apparently wild claims has always inflamed the critics. Charles Mackay, writing in 1844, described his "frantic imaginings" as being "unparalleled in the history of philosophy".[2] The 1929 edition of *Encyclopædia Britannica* questions whether he introduced a single new truth into medicine, although the current edition describes his achievements as 'outstanding'. Even today he is called "one of the most remarkable rogues, quacks and self-advertisers in the history of medicine."[3]

He may have been a good physician, but his philosophy makes it impossible for Paracelsus to be accepted as a scientist in the modern sense. A seer and mystic, he believed that all knowledge was accessible because all objects in the Universe were represented within the human mind. Everything in the macrocosm that surrounds us is mirrored in the microcosm of the mind, so by searching in the mind all secrets of the Universe can be discovered.

He saw his work as natural magic, utilising the virtues that were naturally present in things. This belief in magic went beyond the powers of herbs and minerals: he describes swords that can cut an anvil in two, sorcery to

DECODING PARACELSUS



ENCODED: The Grand Hermetic Arcana.

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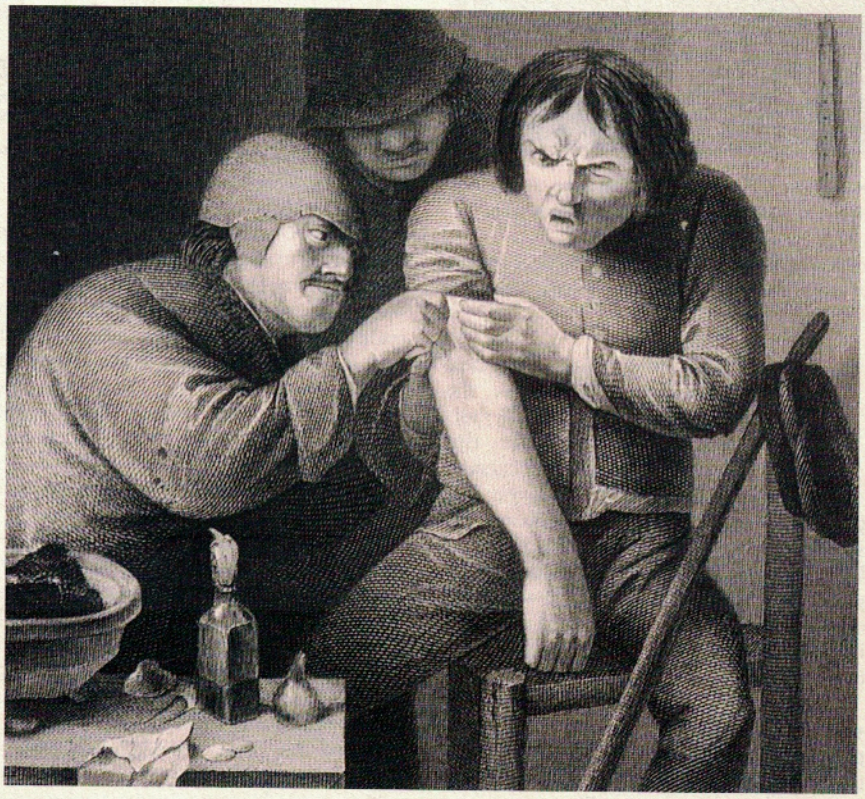
We may have much to learn from Paracelsus, but decoding his writings is not straightforward. Some of this is due to his secrecy; alchemists were jealous of their knowledge and wary of accusations of black magic. They wrote in a code that could only be understood by those initiated into the mysteries. Iron, for instance, was called 'Mars' and lead was 'Venus'. Other substances such as 'white eagle' and 'red lion' remain mysterious. Some of Paracelsus' formulæ were clearly meant to throw others off the scent, such as a recipe for laudanum which involves gold and crushed pearls.

A more difficult obstacle is the lack of existing words for what he was writing about. For example, he speaks of every creature having an alchemist in its stomach which converts food into energy. The alchemist of the pig is the most subtle of all, as it can process material which the alchemist of the human and the sheep cannot. In the 19th century Mackay found this hilarious; but it is apparent enough to us now that the 'internal alchemist' is shorthand for the chemistry of the animals' digestive processes.

Read a physics textbook and you will find familiar words like 'up', 'down', 'top' and 'bottom'. These are different types of subatomic particles and have nothing to do with the words' everyday usage; unless you realise this, the book makes no sense at all. Likewise, when Paracelsus speaks of stars, he is referring not to celestial objects but to subtle influences. His salt, sulphur and mercury, the three active principles of the Universe, are not the substances we know but have more in common with the forces of physics.

It is only when we distinguish what is metaphorical from what is literal and establish the real meanings of words that we can unlock his secrets.



BLEEDING HELL: A barber-surgeon at work, from a 17th-century engraving after Adriaan Brouwer.

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RED MERCURY – THE SECRET OF AZOTH?

Red mercury is an enigmatic substance said to have originated in a Soviet nuclear programme. Described as a dense, cherry-red liquid, it is said to possess remarkable properties. It can be used to make miniature nuclear warheads, stealth coatings and medicine. Although there have been many attempts to sell bogus red mercury on the black market, the real thing has never appeared and is thought to be a myth.

Paracelsus created a substance known as 'Azoth' or philosophers' mercury. It was "a powder of the reddest colour, almost like saffron, yet the whole corporeal substance is liquid like resin... it is a ruby colour of the greatest weight." He carried it in its powdered form in the pommel of his sword. Azoth had two separate functions: "according to the former mode it can be applied for the renewing of the body; according to the latter it is to be used for the transmutation of metals."

AZOTH: From Paracelsus' *Works*.

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Although he claimed to have performed transmutation, Paracelsus was not interested in it. "Though you may be able to produce a ton of gold, consider that you cannot consume a ton." He was more enthusiastic about the healing power of the mercury, which he said consumed all diseases "just like an invisible fire". He used it to cure not only syphilis and leprosy but also lupus and cancers.

In the 20th century, radioactivity was used to transmute metals (in tiny quantities) and to destroy cancer. Paracelsus was knowledgeable about mining, and was initiated into shamanic mysteries in Russian Siberia, an area known for radioactive minerals.

It seems unlikely that Paracelsus actually discovered a miracle substance unknown to western science before or since – so perhaps Red Mercury is simply the modern incarnation of a very old scam. (see ***FT69:44, FT 127:32).***

NOT FLAKY: Paracelsus has become a New Age hero – despite being a hugely practical man.

make bodies invisible, and a magical means of carrying on a conversation with someone 100 miles away.

In recent times, Paracelsus has become a rallying point for the Alternative, the New Age and often the downright flaky – but he does not belong with this crowd. He was above all a practical man who might be described as the first proponent of evidence-based medicine. He stressed the importance of the attitude of both the patient and the physician, and the power of resolute imagination. He was aware of the placebo effect, and put it to good use; but he would pour scorn on some of the current therapies that invoke his name.

Even today, he presents a challenge to science. We may laugh at the Renaissance physicians and their notion of humours, and the apothecaries who ignored mercury compounds and laudanum. We can wonder

HE CLAIMED TO HAVE CREATED A MINIATURE HUMAN IN HIS LABORATORY

how Paracelsus' writings on anæsthesia using 'sweet vitriol' (ether) could be ignored for centuries, until finally being followed up 1846. We can readily believe that he was in some ways 400 years ahead of him time – but was he, perhaps, even more advanced than that?

In the 2000 conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, there were descriptions of new treatments for thrush, athlete's foot and eye infections. All of these were directly based on traditional herbal remedies. Modern medicine is beginning to learn from the despised 'old wives', just as Paracelsus did. Homeopathy, of which Paracelsus is one of the founders, is beginning to win acceptance in orthodox medical circles.

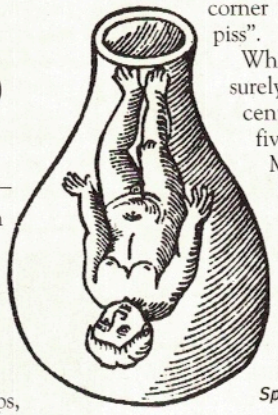
What can we make of his account of the creation of a homunculus (above), a miniature human being, in his laboratory? Cloning and genetic engineering are clearly impossible with 16th-century technology. His statements about the wondrous substance called Azoth (see panel) also strain our credulity, and we are forced to conclude that he must have been, to some degree at least, misguided or a fraud.

Robert Browning provided him with an answer to his critics in the poem *Paracelsus*:

"I press God's lamp Close to my breast; its splendour, soon or late Will pierce the gloom. I shall emerge one day."

Paracelsus' own responses were, unsurprisingly, more robust: "Not one of you will survive, even in the most distant corner where even the dogs will not piss".

Whatever we may think, Paracelsus surely will rise again, like a magnificent, overblown Zeppelin. After five centuries, his claim to the Monarchy of all Arts is looking secure.



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NOTES

1 He also had more respectable teachers, though it is a persistent myth that he studied under Trithemius, a famed alchemist and Abbot of Sponheim. He was actually instructed by the Abbot of *Spanheim*.

2 Charles Mackay, *Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, 1844.

3 Robert Youngson, *Scientific Blunders*, 1998, p. 199

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

David Hambling is a London-based writer whose work appears most frequently in the 'Science' section of *The Guardian*. He has an interest in the history of unorthodox science and has been contributing to *Fortean Times* since 1995.

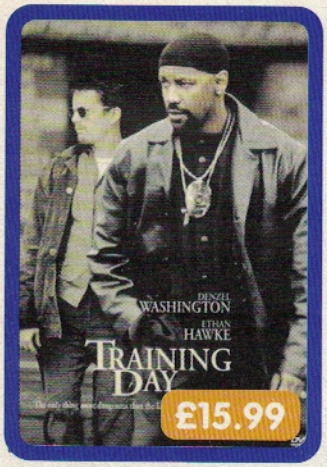
RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED READING

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke
Paracelsus, Essential Readings (Crucible, 1990).

Basilio de Telepnef
Paracelsus, A genius amidst a troubled world (1936, reprinted by The Banton Press 1991).

Region 1 DVDs



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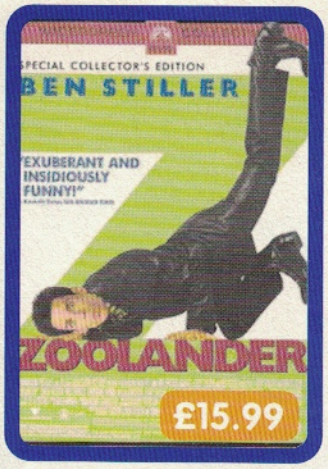
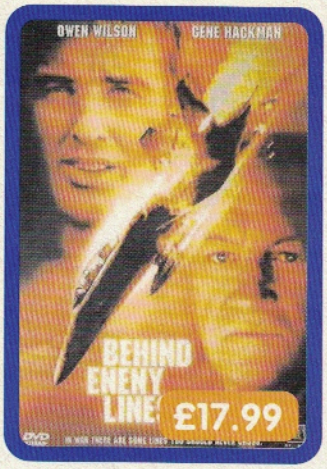


Zoolander



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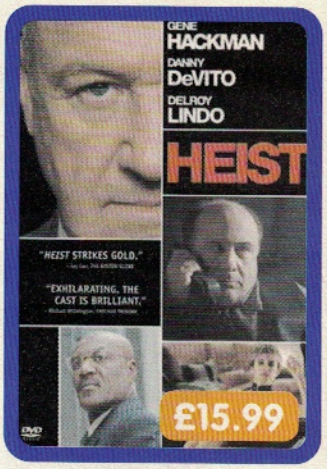

Heist

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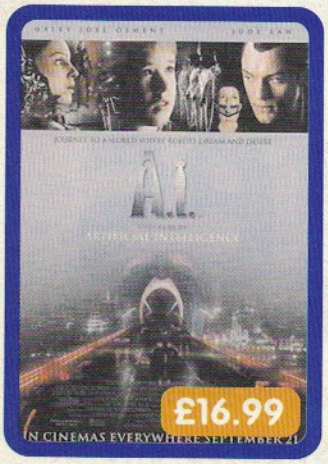

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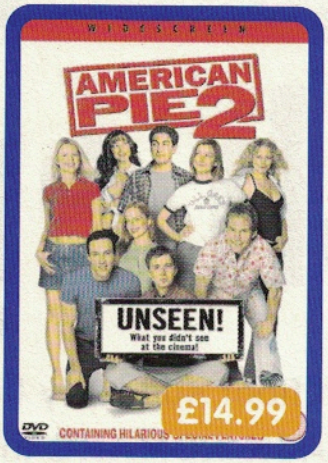
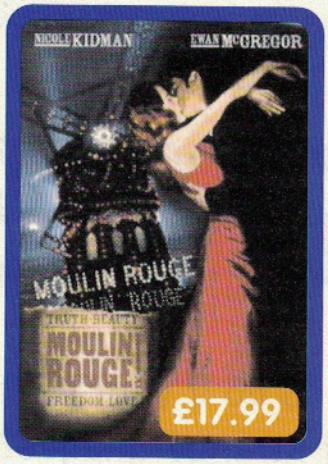


American Pie 2



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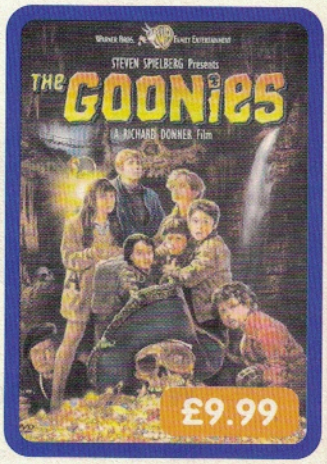


The Goonies

Music

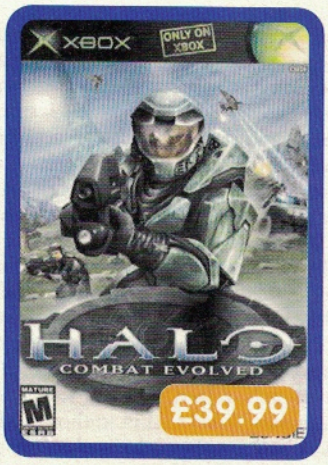
Chemical Brothers "Come With Us"

Alanis Morissette "Under Rug Swept"

Nickelback "Silver Side Up"

Pink "Missundaztood"

Xbox



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Spanish eyes

What would you do if your kitchen floor suddenly began playing host to a series of strange images? JACK ROMANO investigates one of Spain's longest-running and most bizarre mysteries – the enigmatic faces of Belmez.

On the afternoon of 23 August 1971, in Belmez, a southern Spanish village, Mrs Maria Gomez (facing page) was cooking the evening meal when she noticed a small dark mark beside her cooker. She thought it was seeping up from the cement, and put it down to an accidental spillage or perhaps damp. The summer had been exceptionally hot and humid, though the thick stone walls of the house ensured it was relatively cool inside. Within hours, the mark spread and started to look like a human face. No-one paid it any attention. However, over the next few days it became clear that it was, indeed, a human face. Its expression was so deeply melancholy that it sent shivers down the spine of everyone who saw it. Despite the incongruity of the setting, this was clearly the work of a master. A neighbour pointed out that it strongly resembled the face of a saint in the parish church of Jaen, a nearby town. Soap, detergents and prolonged scrubbing failed to shift it, though Maria thought the face's expression had somehow changed subtly after her efforts.

Maria Gomez had little time for masterpieces daubed on her floor; once she had overcome the initial shock (and had invited in all her friends and neighbours), she asked her husband Juan and her son Miguel to take a pick and dig up the offending area, ready for re-concreting. This was duly done; but two weeks later, a similar face appeared in more or less the same spot. Under the watchful eye of the town's mayor, the family chopped it out, cleaned up the edges, attached it to a wall and stuck a Perspex sheet over it, treating it as a portrait. This face, too, was so intensely sad that Miguel hesitated before touching it. The eyes seemed to follow him round the room. The faces were handsome, beautiful perhaps, in an old-fashioned way. Huge soft grey eyes, dark skin, thick tresses of black hair and somewhat prominent noses suggested 'Phoenician', but Juan was in no mood to delve further. Accompanied by a clerk of works, he decided to dig up and re-concrete the area where the faces had appeared, expecting to find, as many had suggested, a mosaic, a fresco, or perhaps old photographs buried underneath and migrating upwards via capillary action. (The texture of the material which formed the faces appeared to be some sort of emulsion, which lent the 'buried photographs' theory some authority.)

WITHIN HOURS, THE MARK BEGAN TO LOOK LIKE A HUMAN FACE

Juan and his assistants dug a 2.8m (9ft) deep x 1.5m (5ft) square hole. They had expected to find photographs or old newspapers:

THREE RIGHT HAND IMAGES: DR ELMAR R GRUBER/FORTEAN PICTURE LIBRARY

instead, they turned up dozens of human bones. The house was adjacent to the parish church, part of which – along with Maria's and her neighbour's houses – had been built on top of an old cemetery. The cemetery lay above an even older one, which had, in turn, once been part of an early monastery or hermitage. This was all well documented, though no-one had realised that the cemetery extended so far. Carbon dating showed that the bones weren't particularly old, coming from the mid-15th century.

The diggers decided to go no further and re-concreted the floor. But anyone hoping that this would end the phenomenon was to be grossly disappointed.

From the middle of September, new faces began to appear on the kitchen floor. The family chipped at each as it appeared, creating piles of cement debris. They were then introduced to Don German de Argumosa, a Madrid professor and one of Spain's leading parapsychologists, who had come to the village to check out the facts for himself – the faces had created a sensation in the Spanish press. Maria Gomez welcomed Argumosa; she appeared keen to end the affair and return to a normal life. Don German decided he couldn't conduct laboratory tests in the house. He asked for an entire face to be taken to Madrid for proper examination, and the image was taken from the house on 1 November 1975. Professor Argumosa, following the protocols set by Schrenck-Notzing, classified the manifestations as 'teleplastia' and, with Maria Gomez's permission, invited in the Spanish Society for Psychical Research. The Society was happy to send a team, among them the experienced – and sceptical – researchers J J Requena, Antonio Garcia and Manuel Capella. Heading the team was Pedro Amoros. Later, German parapsychologist Hans Bender bought in a team; but in the end, none of them could form any definite opinions.

Argumosa decided straight away to put the 'photograph' theory to the test. He lay pristine sheets of large sized photographic film at various points around the house. Predictably, they were simply spoilt by damp and showed nothing when developed.

The floor was cemented yet again, but this only served to provoke more activity. Dozens of faces and figures appeared all over the ground floor of the house between 16 November 1975 and December 1976 as if an artist were working on a fresh canvas. The volume was such that faces appeared on top of others; some faded and were replaced; others merged with those beside them. Some were full figures; others just a head and bust. A number were life-sized, others smaller or larger. More than one picture featured a life-sized central face, surrounded by half a dozen smaller satellite faces. There were men and women, some dressed, some naked. One lady even had her long hair blowing in the breeze. Some seemed permanent, others lasted just long enough to be photographed. If a face was chopped out from the cement and taken away from the house, it almost immediately appeared to dry off, first with white flecks appearing, then gradually fading, but leaving a trace outline. When rehydrated, it would promptly 'come back to life', but marginally darker than it had originally been. It appeared to be an unusual form of osmosis or diffusion, coupled with some kind of naturally occurring 'fixative', so perhaps an obscure, little understood chemical reaction was taking place. The parapsychologists were getting nowhere; it was time for the full force of the scientific establishment.

However, at this juncture, a number of events occurred which had a direct bearing on the way the investigation was to develop.

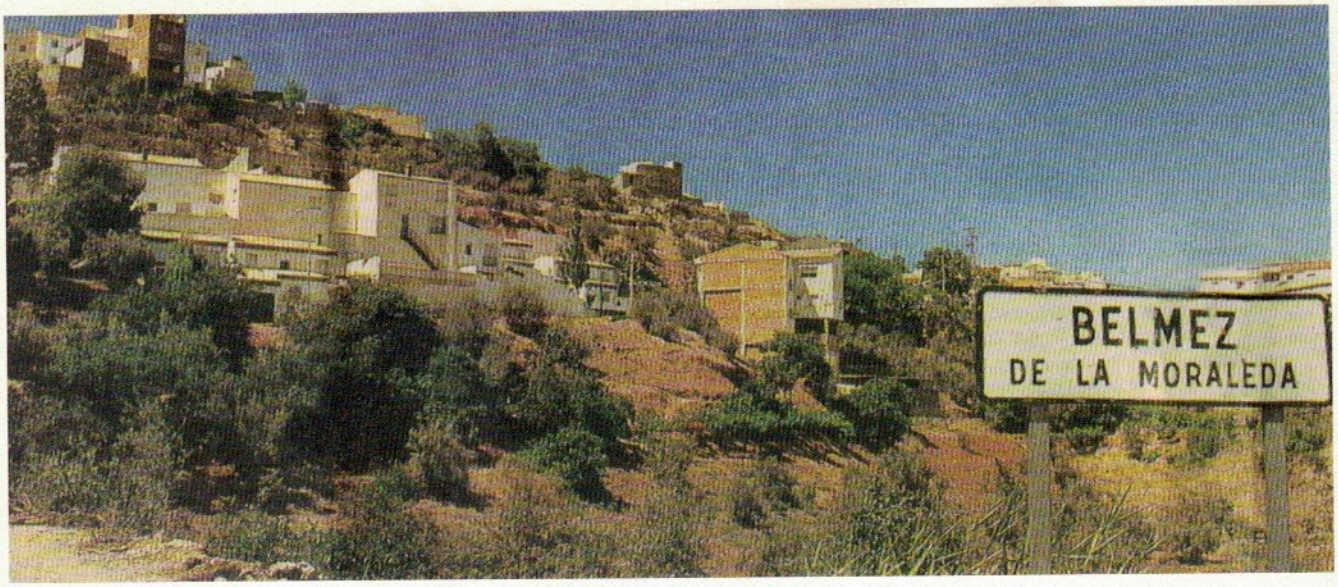
First, Miguel Gomez declared himself sick of the whole thing and left to live in another region of Spain. His leaving made no difference; faces kept appearing in the house with depressing regularity.

Next, the Gomez's neighbour claimed that his house had been plagued by typical poltergeist activity – pictures falling from walls, banging, pots and pans impossibly balanced and so on – for some time. The phenomena were still going on, though slightly less dramatically. As Miguel had been gone some months, this ruled him out as the origin of poltergeist activity.

Thirdly, a researcher corroborating dates, times and diaries spotted that the first face had appeared at roughly the same time as the adjacent church had been extensively repaired. During these repairs, the chancel was dug up and layers of human bones discovered. Although they were treated with due reverence and reburied in a sepulchre, no attention had been paid to the fact that the bones had become inextricably jumbled up, and any number of skeletons had been separated.

Lastly, Maria Gomez agreed to take a lie detector test, which she

FACE TO FACE: Some of the faces which appeared on the floor of the house of Maria Gomez Pereira's house in Belmez (facing page and above). The three pictures at the top of this page show a face that first formed in late August 1971, photographed over a period of a few weeks and with the changes it underwent clearly visible.



VILLAGE OF MYSTERY: Belmez de la Moraleda, whose church is said by some to stand on the nodal point where many leys intersect.

passed easily – but then, with faces appearing before their very eyes, researchers couldn't seriously have believed that she was secretly painting them. However, it went a long way to giving her a reputation for honesty and reliability; something which assumed importance later, when it was found that she might well have been a natural medium.

In the meantime, the Society for Psychical Research probed and dug, measured and tested. They removed samples of concrete for analysis and fitted infra-red lamps all over the house. In attempts to replicate the phenomena, they applied caustic soda, arsenic, nitrates, chlorine, chromium and silver; they tried to control the relative humidity inside the house (it was naturally a very high 80 per cent) and experimented with different temperatures. The background radiation was regularly tested, and found to be consistently at the higher limit of 'normal'. Next, the contents of Maria's kitchen were scrutinised, particularly anything that could contain fat, acids or pigments. Even the chimney flue, which contained significant amounts of soot and ash, was sealed off. But no-one could replicate the faces or have any effect on the way they appeared; all they discovered was that an underground stream terminated underneath the kitchen – it simply disappeared into the bedrock. Science, then, reserved judgement; but – not for the first time – events were about to take a turn for the dramatic.

In 1959, Friedrich Jürgenson was recording wildlife in a Swedish forest. When he got home, he found that a disembodied voice had, in effect, 'commandeered' the tape to talk knowledgeably about the local birdlife. Thus began the science of 'Psicofonias', and German de Argumosa was Spain's leading exponent. By the late 1970s, it had become established practice, and German had enjoyed some moderate successes. He set up two high-quality microphones (he called them 'magnetophones') in diagonally opposite corners of Maria Gomez's kitchen, plus a third secret control which he hid in his briefcase. All were connected to recorders. The room was sealed, all windows and doors taped, and the party retired for the night. Argumosa wasn't sure what to expect; in a

THERE WAS AN ATMOSPHERE OF VIOLENCE AND AGONY

way it was simply a shot in the dark. When he played the tapes back, everyone present was deeply affected. A babble of voices had been recorded, together with moans, shouts, whispers, high-pitched screams, insults, profanities and seemingly senseless fragments. The latter included such statements as "It all goes with the men" and "Hell begins here." There was an overwhelming atmosphere of violence and agony, followed by more fragmentary statements including "I follow buried" and "Drunkard". The climax was the voice of a child, screaming a panic-stricken "Mammaaaa." This distressed everyone in the room, but more was to come: a stern male voice commanded the group to "Kill Yei", which made no sense, then a female voice introduced herself as "Anghela."

Argumosa asked everyone to calm down before they discussed the recordings; they were too shaken to take a measured view. As the recordings had proved a success, he also suggested that later on the team should ask some questions out loud, which would be recorded, along with any answers. First to agree was Maria, who was understandably puzzled as to why her home had been singled out as the site for the phenomena. She somewhat shamefacedly asked: "Do you like my company?" to which a male voice answered "Yes". One of German's team then asked: "Who are those that created the faces?" Another male voice immediately answered "I was once… YOU." A third voice added "A great pity." A researcher asked if any entities were present in the room, and a refined, educated female voice answered: "Yes, souls." There were numerous other questions put to the 'souls' but the full content of the tapes is yet to be revealed; much of it by Argumosa's own admission was senseless rubbish, and a lot of it was incoherent. But, spirit communication is typically a jumble of facts, fragments, mistakes and non-sequiturs. There is generally a warped sense of time and inappropriate use of language. The fact that Argumosa's tapes are so chaotic, if anything, gives them more status, but Argumosa has to date still retained large portions of the recordings.

However, the whole subject of the Argumosa tapes is fraught with controversy. No one doubts the electric effect they had on the listeners, but the local priest, Fr Don Antonio Molina, made a remarkable claim which throws serious doubt on Argumosa and his team. He said that on the night the microphones were installed in Maria Gomez's kitchen, he overheard Argumosa talking to one of his students in a bar. Argumosa, he said, was boasting that he could send signals via a discreetly parked car, fitted with a radio transmitter. But even if this were true, it doesn't detract from the makeshift 'séance' which was recorded in front of nearly a dozen witnesses. Later the Society for Psychical Research video-recorded faces appearing and made their own recordings of voices. Pedro Amoros from the Society also has no tangible answers, preferring to take a Christian viewpoint and tracing the cause of all the disturbances back to the insensitive Church excavations. Like scientist Martinez Romero, he says that the faces are "*The projection of forms caused by an unknown energy*," a statement which effectively sums up the current state of affairs.

But these 'forms' were evidently much troubled. Everyone remarked on how desperately sad most of the faces looked. Some people couldn't bear to be in the room for more than a few seconds. It was as if the faces were trying to communicate some great tragic secret, and the sense of despair and oppression they generated was highly disconcerting. Worse, from time to time, the faces seemed to subtly move, adopting a slightly modified expression. Others seemed to 'age' visibly, going through a lifetime in just a few hours, before fading away. In

contrast, the most famous image of all, "el Pelao", has been there virtually from the start, and is still fresh today. This gave researchers another set of problems. If osmosis or diffusion was involved, why didn't the faces distort? Why did some fade so quickly, while others appear permanent? More importantly, how could a face go through a complete lifetime – from child to elderly crone – in the space of a few hours? Some type of intelligence was obviously controlling it all.

The whole business was rife with rumours. It was claimed that the houses had once been used by witches for black magic rituals; others said that Moors had lived there in a time of persecution. The latter statement may well have been true, but similar situations are to be encountered all over southern Spain; none of these have faces appearing all over the ground floor. A bizarre aside was something seen by Argumosa, which he hesitated to make public but noted in his diaries. On 15 December 1973, he had set up microphones in the house, and an odd phenomenon occurred around one of them. A yellow-grey amorphous mass seemed to be developing, strangely enough with a rock where its head would have been. It faded before Argumosa had a chance to photograph it, but he saw it clearly enough to decide that the rock was from a river – it was polished smooth by the action of water. Not surprisingly, he felt that to go public with this at such a sensitive stage in the investigations would prejudice his professional integrity.

The Belmez case has been criticised because of the lax way in which it was originally investigated, and at the outset this was undeniable. Virtually everyone in the village went to the house and formed an opinion; too many disparate groups of researchers came along, each with their own pet theories. There is no question that early on, controls in the house and its precincts were poor, but the faces have been appearing for over 25 years, and various bodies have since ensured that strict scientific protocols are in place.

Since then, the faces must have become the most analysed strange phenomena of all time. The face lifted by Argumosa and taken to Madrid was subjected to an extraordinary sequence of tests. It was bisected longitudinally, then sliced into sections. The image was 2mm deep and had been applied to the surface, rather than leached upwards; behind it lay nothing more sinister than sand and cement. The pieces were then baked in an oven at 650 C° for several hours to burn off any fat that might have been absorbed; they were x-rayed, put through spectrum analysis, and examined under a microscope. They were then subjected to organic and inorganic analysis, treated to a dose of fluorine, photographed through filters, and then under an electron microscope. All of this proved inconclusive, so samples were sent to Jose Luis Jordan Pena, Spain's leading authority on cement and its composition, who was retained as consultant by construction giant AGROMAN. Given the history behind the faces, Pena spent a great deal of time analysing the samples, specifically looking for ways that they could have appeared chemically. By now, the floor of the house had been cemented several times. The cement mixture, though, was constant – limestone ($CaC0_3$), shale, clay minerals, quartz and gypsum.

FACES HAVE APPEARED FOR 25 YEARS

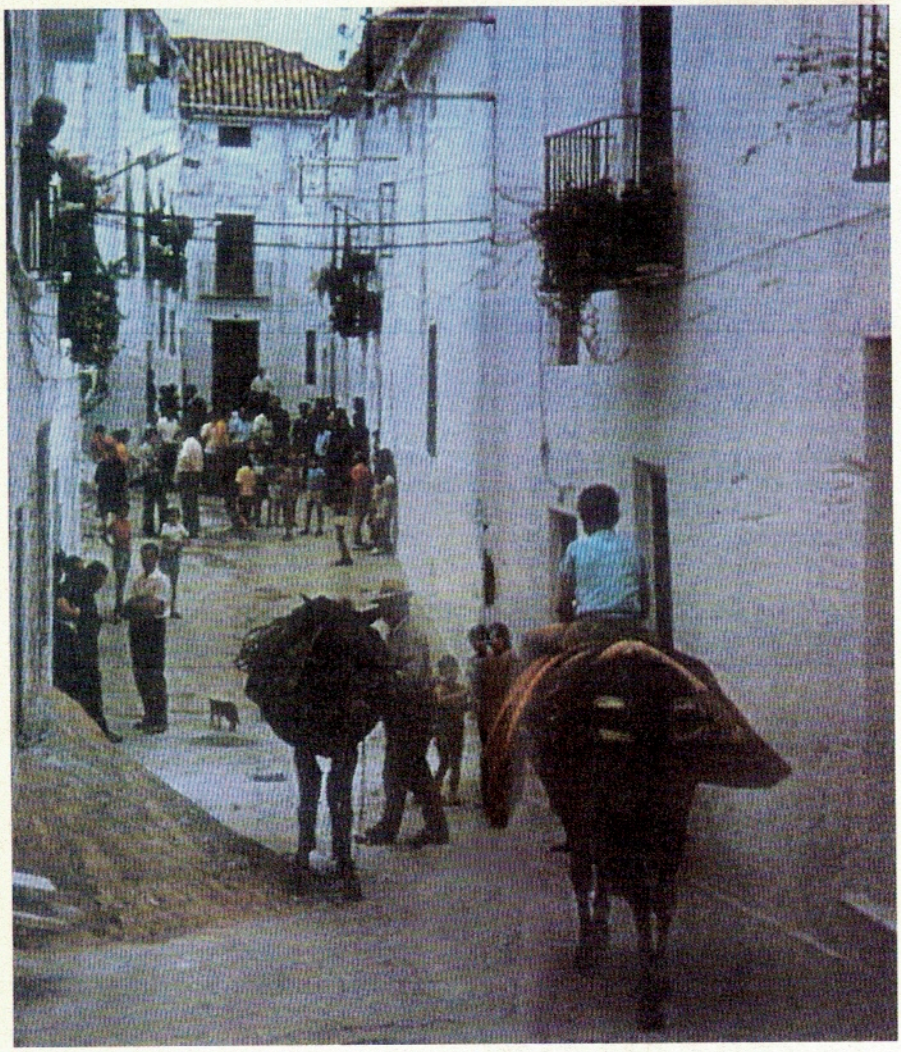
When ground to powder and mixed with water, these substances interact and form 'cement', a new crystalline structure of immense strength which gets stronger with time, until the chemical process is finished. Cement may set quickly, but the bonding process is not completed for several years.

The Belmez cement showed nothing out of the ordinary. Pena ran various tests to ascertain whether it had been contaminated, but found no pigments or extraneous chemicals. He then ran 'accelerated' tests to see if any latent chemicals might have become active as the cement bonded fully over time. His thoroughness was admirable, but he could find nothing unusual in the Belmez cement.

Though these results were inconclusive, Pena believed that sodium silicate from the cement/sand mixture, plus household vinegar, in certain conditions and combinations, could cause a weak image to form. In the meantime, further analysis of the 'sample' face showed up tiny amounts of zinc and silver salts. As both are used in the photographic developing process, this gave new life to the 'photo image' theory, but the amounts involved would never have been enough to be effective, and they were only found on Argumosa's original sample face. Other samples showed nothing, so the results could have come from laboratory contamination.

A more laughable theory was that some of the images came from a size 39 footprint which somehow distorted and gave the impression of a face; this was promptly dismissed when faces began to spontaneously appear halfway up walls. In the late 1980s, a schoolteacher from the village denounced the whole thing as a fraud painted by the family. She explained how when the first face appeared on the kitchen floor, she had touched it, and her hand was marked by what was clearly dye or wet ink. She hadn't come forward before because she hadn't felt it was relevant. Given that Maria and her husband

MAKE SURE YOU GET MY GOOD SIDE: Psychical researchers photograph one of the faces that was cut from the floor; its expression changed over time.



STREET LIFE: Ever since the faces first appeared, Maria's house has been inundated with visitors.

were bereft of any artistic talent, the teacher's statement caused the police to interview a local artist, but he was able to prove that when the phenomena began he was working in another region of Spain. He explained that Belmez had nothing for him and he rarely came back, except to visit friends and relatives and these didn't number the Gomez-Pereira family. Its also fair to point out that by the mid-1990s, the Gomez-Pereira bank account had swollen substantially; and the village, hitherto a poor mining community, was enjoying a healthy boom in tourism.

CERTAIN FACES DEVELOPED THEIR OWN 'FAN-CLUB'

Interest in the faces was so great that at one point Radio Jaen broadcast live from Maria's kitchen and described them as they appeared. Certain of the more permanent faces developed a 'fan club' and were given nicknames, among them "El Pelao", "La Dama del Camison" (The lady of the blouse) and "La Dama de las Escaleras" (The lady of the stairs). Callers would ring the station daily to check how a particular face was developing.

But by the mid 1990s, the whole affair began to lose its novelty. There was something dully repetitive about face after face appearing. There was no overriding message, nothing of major import; just what seemed to be an invisible, highly skilled but erratic artist having a flamboyant time, using the Gomez's house as a huge canvas. And that was all. It became boring. The only real interest lay in the fact it was happening at all; and what style the artist might use for the next face. Further 'psicofonias' experiments generated nothing but static; there was clearly no more mileage in Belmez, and the 'sensational' phase was over. Given time, science would get to the root of it all; failing that, someone would be arrested for perpetrating the fraud. Meanwhile, everyone simply learned to live with it. The general feeling was that if ignored, the force that produced the faces would over time lose its vigour. Just as it had come of its own accord, it would similarly go away. One theory had it that whatever was generating the faces fed off the interest and the attendant energy that onlookers bought with them, just as demons are said to feed on fear. Cutting off this energy source might bring an end to the phenomenon. To an extent this appears to have been the case; but faces continued to appear, just less often and with less variety.

Gradually the media left, and with the frenzy abated, researchers began to turn their attention to the protagonists in the drama. It was suggested that Maria Gomez might be a natural medium, and the faces could be some kind of ectoplasm, or thought patterns generated by her. Some of the groups of faces vaguely resembled paintings by old masters, and it was felt that she may have seen these and was somehow projecting them onto the walls and floors, rather like the celebrated Ted Serios could allegedly "thought-project" pictures though a tube onto photographic paper. The conditions downstairs were perhaps exactly what was required. This is something she vehemently denies, and from all accounts she is happy – within reason – to co-operate in any experiments the scientists can devise. At the end of 1999, aged 81, Maria was still undergoing tests, all of which were inconclusive. However, there does appear to be a correlation between her moods, the appearance of new faces, how quickly these faces 'age' and how long they last.

But occult researchers have ample clues. Followers of Tom Lethridge would quickly latch on to the ancient cemetery, the underground stream, elevated humidity levels, slightly stronger than average radiation readings, and electrical impulses, all of them amounting to a unique set of conditions. It has also been pointed out that the church next door to the Gomezes' house is on a nodal point where a number of leys cross. However, this again is not unusual (many European churches are similarly sited), but allied to the conditions given above, it assumes a new importance.

The magnetophone which attracted Argumosa's rock-headed "amorphous mass" could also provide a clue; something was clearly happening around energy centres. It might be that some great, tragic event could have occurred in the house, leaving its 'imprint' to develop when conditions were right. Others might wish to talk further to the adolescent Miguel, Maria's son. Teenagers have often been the focus of poltergeist activity; but few if any poltergeists have continued for 25 years, long after the disaffected teenager has gone. The fact is that despite intensive efforts, scientists as yet have no answers – they have only succeeded in eliminating various possibilities. In 2001, research centred on the history of the house, the village, and Maria Gomez herself. Among the confusion, accusations and frustration, one thing remains certain. Even as you read this, faces are still appearing. FT

RESOURCES

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Jack Romano's career in advertising and gas and oil exploration has taken him all over the world – often to remote places where he was able to pursue his hobby of researching local folklore and legend. He is also interested in Tom Lethbridge and Allan Kardec.

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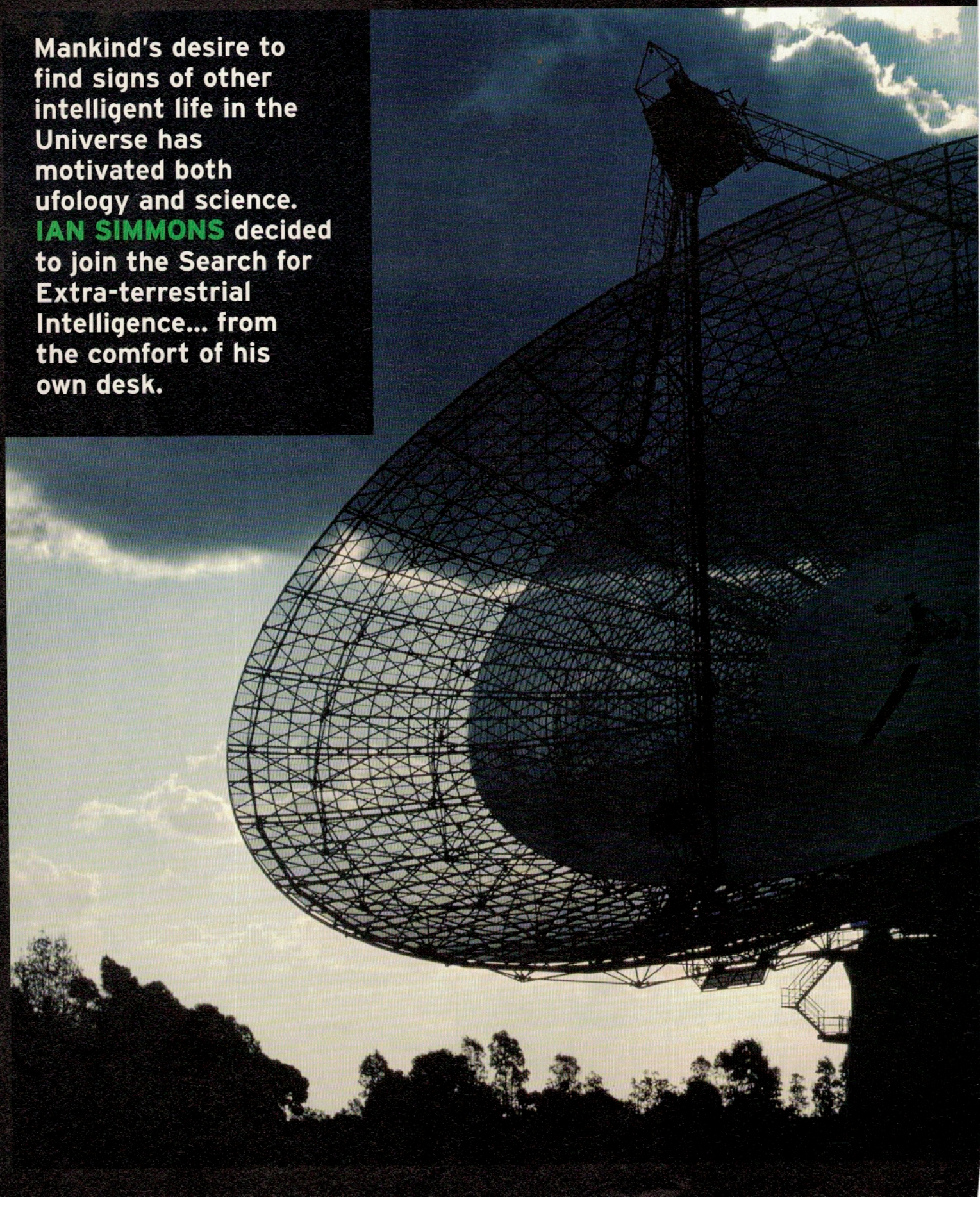

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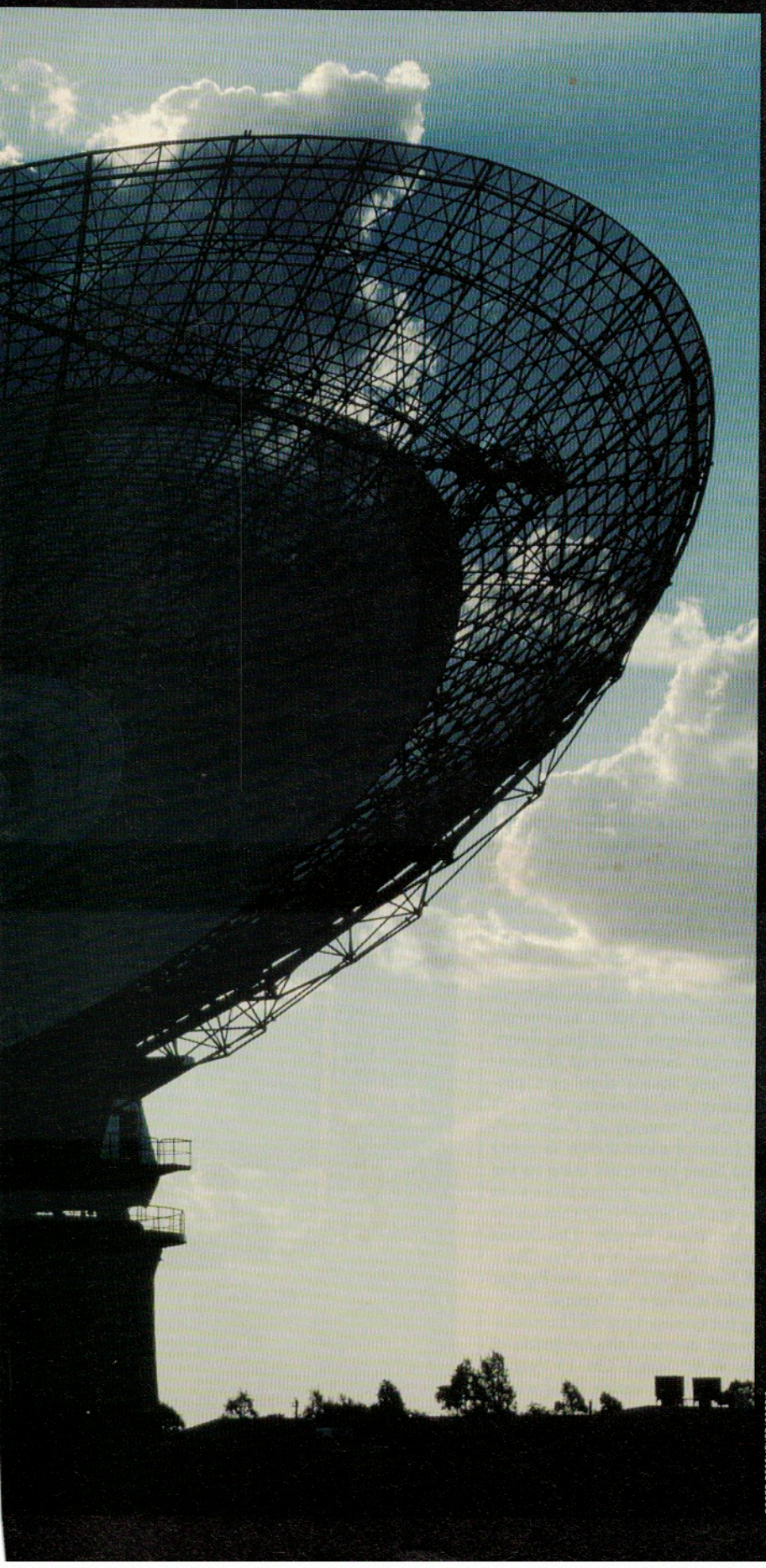

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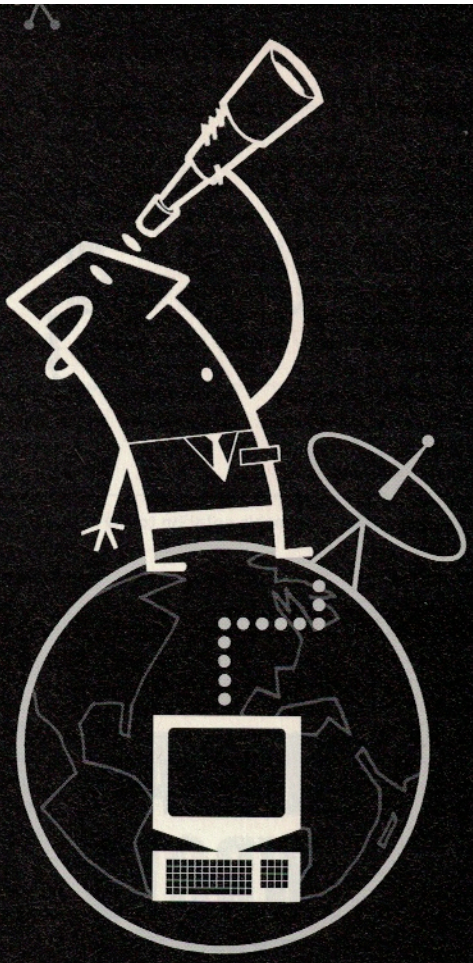


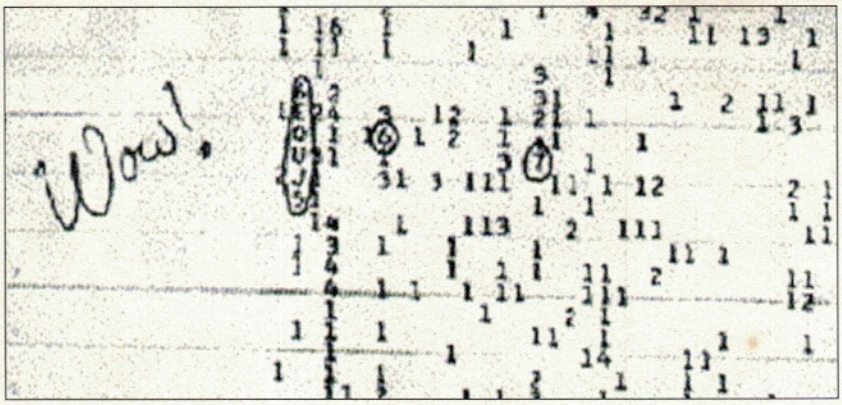
DAVE NEEDHAM

MY SCREENSAVER WAS LOOKING FOR SIGNS OF LIFE ON OTHER WORLDS

I booted up my computer to write this piece and headed off to the kitchen to make a cup of tea. On returning, I found the screen seething with activity in the form of a brightly-coloured, three-dimensional graph. Sensing the lack of on-screen activity, the screensaver had kicked in… and this one is different from most: it was looking for signs of life on other worlds.

I had downloaded and installed the 'SETI@home' screensaver from the website of the SETI Institute in California and as I brewed, it was churning its way through a batch of data collected from radio telescopes to locate any anomalous signals hidden in it which could represent messages from other civilisations. Using the downtime of over three million computers world-wide – called 'distributed computing' – to crunch SETI data, gives the SETI Institute computing power greater than that of any supercomputer, just by using spare moments on ordinary domestic PCs and the communication power of the internet.

'SETI@home', developed by astrophysicist Dan Werthimer along with colleague David Anderson, is just one of the tools being used to seek evidence of life elsewhere in the Universe. As astronomers develop ever more powerful telescopes and computing power



WOW!: Ehrman's notation to the amazing signal.

EHRMAN WROTE WOW! IN THE MARGIN – THE SIGNAL HAD NOT COME FROM EARTH

expands exponentially, it is becoming easier and easier to search the expanse of the sky for signals which could be being beamed at us from other planets, and the SETI Institute, among others, are taking full advantage of this.

SETI, itself, began in the early 1960s as a branch of radio astronomy. That science grew out of the discovery, in 1932, that many astronomical objects emit radio waves, which can be used to build up a picture of what they are actually like. By 1959, enough was known about the natural sources of radio waves in space that speculation began about the possibility of detecting other civilisations by looking for radio emissions which could not be explained by natural phenomena.

WERTHIMER: Seti at home doin' nothing?

An article in the 19 September, 1959, issue of the science journal *Nature* – 'Searching for Interstellar Communications' by radio astronomers Giuseppi Cocconi and Philip Morrison (both of whom were working at Cornell University)– proposed a strategy for finding alien civilisations by their radio emissions; but Frank Drake was already ahead of them. At the National Radio Astronomy Observatory, Green Bank, West Virginia, he was preparing to carry out an experiment almost identical to theirs. Drake's Project Ozma, conducted in 1960, was very limited in scope, surveying two sun-like stars for a few weeks at just one frequency; it was without success, but it opened the way for SETI to become a serious scientific endeavour.

This inspired the Soviets, who began a bold strategy of listening to the sky with enormous omni-directional antennæ covering large sections of the sky in the hope they could detect at least one civilisation out there radiating massive amounts of transmitter power. As far as we know, this, too, was unsuccessful.

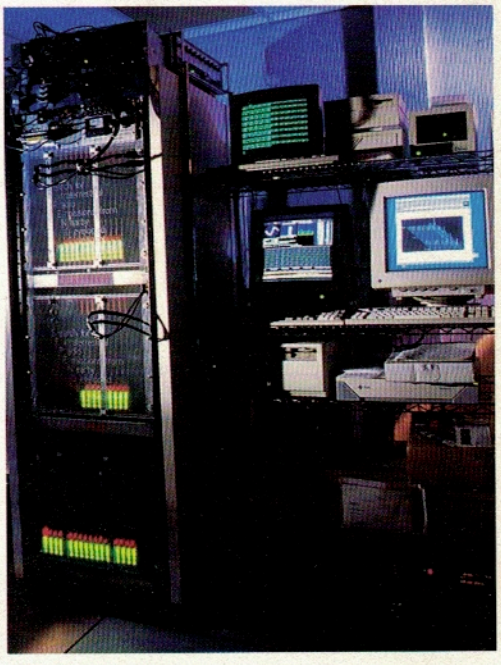
In the 1970s, NASA looked at the possibility of SETI research, concluded it had a worthwhile chance of success and began laying groundwork for their own project. Several other organisations in the US also started their own programmes, including the Planetary Society's Project META, the University of California's SERENDIP Project (control room shown at right) and a project at Ohio State University using its Big Ear telescope in Delaware. These programmes were small although long-running; SERENDIP (Search for Extraterrestrial Radio from Nearby Developed Populations) continues today and the Ohio State project ran from 1973 until 1997, when the Big Ear was demolished to make way for a golf course.

The loss of the Big Ear outraged the SETI community, partly due to its role in one of the landmarks of the SETI era… the Wow! signal. On 15 August 1977, Jerry Ehman checked the signals the Ear was pulling down, as he and his colleagues had routinely done daily since 1973. It was listening to 'The Cosmic Waterhole' – a range of frequencies between 1.42 and 1.7 gigahertz (1.42–1.7 billion oscillations per second). This is the range of frequencies in which hydrogen molecules and hydroxyl radicals (the components of water) produce radio waves in interstellar space. This is thought to be the logical range for other civilisations to transmit messages in, as any signal would stand out very clearly over the natural signals.

The data flowing in through the Big Ear was too voluminous to be stored on 1970 computer technology – amazingly, compared to today's standards, the radio observatory's computer had just 32K of RAM and a megabyte hard disk – so it was printed out to be analysed manually by SETI volunteers. This was Ehman's job on that fateful day. As he scrolled through the torrents of paper, he was amazed to find one point at which the voltage trace leapt massively – clearly a signal of phenomenal proportions. It was a massive, unmodulated blast of radio waves, lasting 37 seconds, from the direction of Sagittarius.

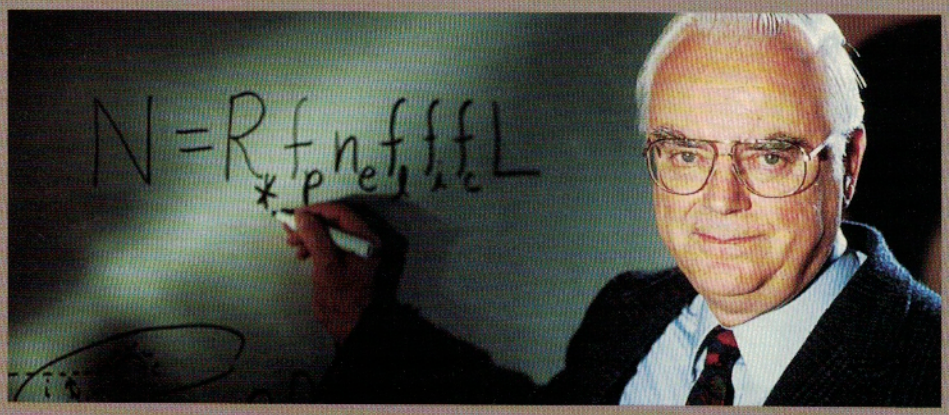
Ehman wrote "Wow!" in the margin and took it to John Krauss, the observatory director. Between them Ehman and Krauss established that the signal had not come from Earth, any satellite or known astronomical source, but they could not come to any further conclusion about what it actually was. The nearest star in the direction that the Big Ear was pointing is 220 light years away. This meant that if the transmission was being produced by a dish as large as the Earth's largest radio telescope – the 300-metre (984 ft) Arecibo dish in Puerto Rico – the Wow! signal would have had to originate from an impressive 2.2 gigawatt transmitter.

The Wow! signal was never repeated, which was a real problem – to be accepted as a genuine ET message, there needs to be repetition – the fact that it was seemingly unmodulated was not. SETI researcher Paul Schuch explained: "Each channel of the receiver spanned 10 kilohertz, so [the signal] could easily have encompassed a carrier wave plus its modulation sidebands. We'd never be able to distinguish between the two." The signal could have contained a wealth of information that we could not discern. This is the most tantalising result ever received in the history of SETI and inspired Carl Sagan to write his novel *Contact* (later filmed with Jodie Foster). When the Big Ear was demolished, the dish was cut up into



DR SETH SHOSTAK/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

THE DRAKE EQUATION



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How do we know how many civilisations out there might be trying to contact us? In truth, we have no idea, but Frank Drake, the astronomer who carried out the first SETI research in 1960, came up with an equation which makes some attempt to work out N, the number of communicative civilisations.

R x Fp x Ne x Fl x Fi x Fc x L = N

where

R = Rate of formation of suitable stars in our galaxy (number per year)
Fp = Fraction (percentage) of those stars with planets
Ne = Number of 'earths' per planetary system
Fl = Fraction (percentage) of those planets where life develops
Fi = Fraction (percentage) of sites with intelligent life
Fc = Fraction (percentage) of planets where technology develops
L = 'Lifetime' of communicating civilisations (years)

As many of these terms can only be put in as guesstimates, the answers produced have ranged from one (ourselves) to 100 million, but the equation has served to set out the parameters which need to be considered and has stimulated much energetic debate on the question of alien intelligence.

small squares and sold off to SETI enthusiasts to commemorate the Wow! signal.

In the 1980s, SETI continued in the US on a modest scale, including a project run by Paul Horowitz, launched in 1983 and funded by Steven Spielberg (appropriately enough from the profits of *ET*). NASA continued to procrastinate about its involvment in SETI until 1988, when it finally decided to take the plunge; they promised to start their programme four years later to mark the 500th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the New World. Launched with a great fanfare, their project – which was supposed to sample a billion frequencies every second for at least 10 years – was stillborn. Congress withdrew funds less than a year later, leaving the project dead in the water.

This collapse of NASA's effort, ironically, led to a great upsurge of SETI activities, as the astronomers, from their programmes, established other ways to carry on the work unfettered by NASA bureaucracy; this was primarily through the founding of the privately-funded SETI Institute. Their greatest effort has been Project Phœnix. This began listening to the stars in 1995, using the Parkes 210-foot radio telescope in New South Wales, Australia, and later the 140-foot telescope at Green Bank (close to the antenna used by Frank Drake to start the SETI project). Project Phœnix does not search the whole sky, but concentrates on nearby sun-like stars (within a distance of 200 light years), particularly those that have, in recent years, been shown to have planetary systems of some kind. The University of California, Berkeley, is also collecting data from Arecibo – continuing its SERENDIP project – and it is this that is being analysed by my screensaver. This makes use of the help of millions of members of the public, but there are other ways that make it possible for amateurs to join the search for alien civilisations.

The SETI League, founded in 1994, is a grassroots international alliance of amateur and professional radio astronomers, radio enthusiasts, microwave experimenters and digital signal processing amateurs, who have linked up to pursue the SETI dream. They have over 1,200 members worldwide and between them, more than 100 amateur radio telescopes scan-

THIS MEANS THE PUBLIC CAN HELP SEARCH FOR ALIEN LIFE

DAVID PARKER/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

BUT AREN'T THEY HERE ALREADY?

One of the questions most often asked of SETI researchers is: "Why are you bothering?" For many people, the presence of aliens on Earth is an incontrovertible fact, evinced by the myriad of UFO reports on record. SETI researchers, however, point out that despite these, no convincing physical evidence of an alien presence – an artifact made of material with an isotopic signature of another star, or an organism with non-terrestrial biology – has ever been found. They are also highly sceptical that anything as important as an alien presence on Earth could be kept from us – even by a massive conspiracy.

Primarily, though, they point out the difficulty any alien civilisation would face in getting a UFO here. At current spaceship speeds we'd need 40,000 years to reach just our nearest star, although there are technologies on the cards that could reduce this to less than a human lifetime. This speed, however, has a considerable energy cost; the laws of physics dictate that such a journey would consume about the equivalent of 1,000 years' energy consumption by the Earth at the current rate, even for a modestly-sized ship. This remains the case even if an as yet undreamed of propulsion system is used.

DAVE NEEDHAM

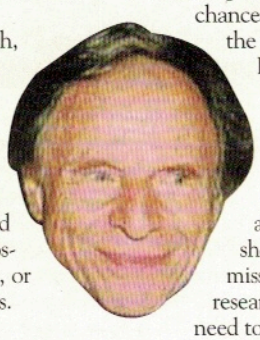
Going anywhere near light-speed increases the energy consumption even more dramatically. According to relativity theory, the closer to light speed an object travels, the greater its mass and – consequently – the energy needed to propel it. When it reaches light speed, it has infinite mass and so needs an infinite amount of energy to move it.

This makes it seem unlikely to SETI researchers that we are being visited by physical craft. It would be simpler to communicate by radio or other means.

THE CHANCE OF LIFE BEING OUT THERE GETS BETTER ALL THE TIME

ning the sky for the next Wow! signal. With the increasing sophistication of amateur technology, it is now possible for these amateurs to each bring to bear almost as much searching power as the original Green Bank telescope had in 1977, as they search far more stars at far more frequencies for a greater time than almost any other project. This gives them a huge advantage over projects at fixed locations which look at one star at a time.

In the 40 or so years of SETI research, besides the Wow! signal, over 60 signals which cannot be attributed to a human or astronomical source have been detected. However, none has been repeated or detected for a long enough duration to be confirmed as being of alien origin. So why haven't we detected any alien signals yet? There are many possibilities; there may be no one out there, or if they are, they are not sending messages.



SETI THEORIST, PHILIP MORRISON PICTURED LEFT

Certainly, our major attempt at making contact wouldn't have passed our own criteria for intelligent communication: it was a largely symbolic one-off, three-minute burst of information directed at a star 25,000 light years away, which was never repeated. It needs a lot of energy to send a radio message of this kind; if other civilisations think like us, we will not find many messages.

We could find, however, the inadvertent emissions of their broadcast media. Our own radio and TV signals beam out into space relentlessly and now contaminate a distance of 100 light years in all directions around us, but being broad-band and cacophanous, they are perhaps harder to recognise as intelligent signals. More advanced civilisations may also have developed media which do not spew forth this wasteful energy sphere. There is also the possibility that ionised interstellar gas breaks up the signals, making it impossible to detect one of any duration, or to catch repeated broadcasts of the same signal.

Some people believe radio-based SETI reflects a 1950s mindset rather than the best way to communicate across the galaxy. Many astronomers now think that it is more likely that interplanetary communication could be optical, with tightly-focused billion-watt lasers blasting information towards us. The advantage of these is that they require far less energy than radio communication, can contain more information and can penetrate further… so an increasing number of projects are searching for alien signals in the optical wavelengths, using sophisticated spectrometers. The chances of life out there are looking better all the time; protein, the basic components of DNA, have been found in interstellar space, and over the last six years, dozens of planets have been discovered around other suns.

Some sceptics mock SETI for being unscientific and for having a non-falsifiable premise (you can never conclusively show there is no one out there). But to scoff misses the point: SETI is not just a simple research project – it reflects a basic human need to discover whether we are alone or part of a teeming galactic community of intelligences. This need is vividly demonstrated by the cornucopia of UFO sightings and the tenacity of the believers. But while ufology is a clear manifestation of our desire to encounter other intelligences, it also embodies a warning: if the intelligences we contact turn out to behave like ufology's Greys, we may live to regret our gregariousness. FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Ian Simmons runs *Inspire!*, a hands-on science centre in Norwich and is a contributing editor of *Fortean Times*.

RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED SURFING

SETI Institute **www.seti-inst.edu**

Screensaver program
http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu/

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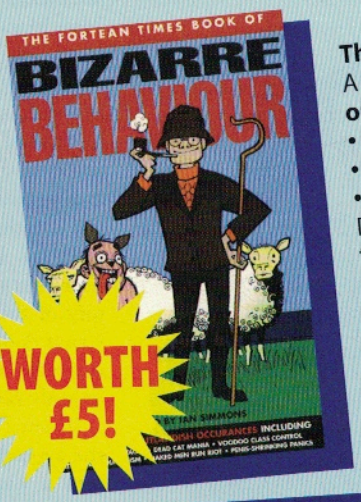

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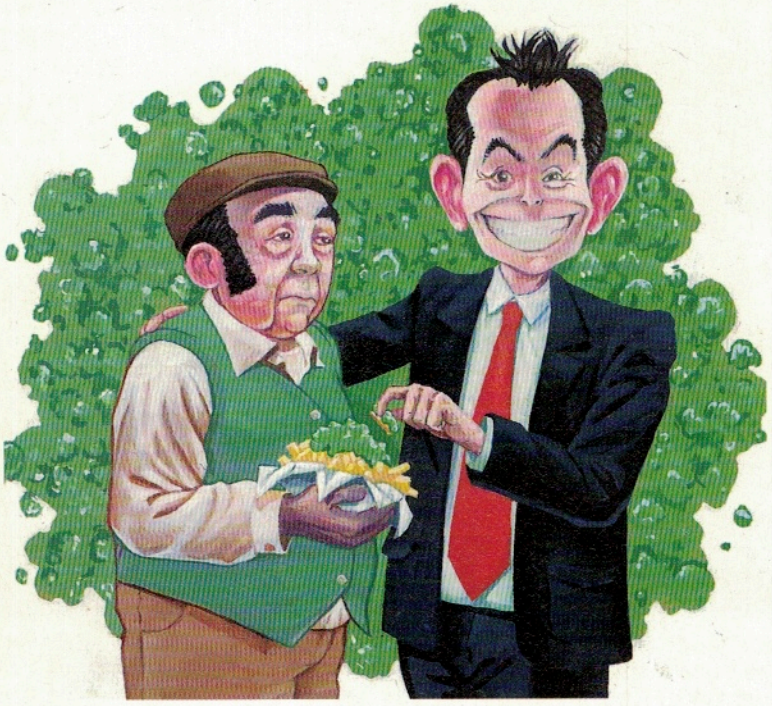
The guacamole affair

Can the origin of an urban legend be traced? **PAUL SCREETON** dons bib and tucker and goes in search of his constituency MP, Peter Mandelson... and his mythical mushy peas.



ED TRAQUINO

AT A RECENT LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE, UNRECONSTRUCTED socialist deputy prime minister John Prescott made fun of the Rubiks Cube backdrop, and going through each primary colour, he ended with green: "In London we call it 'avocado'. In Hartlepool they call it 'mushy peas'."

When, in 1990, Peter Mandelson was Hartlepool's MP-in-waiting, a tale with more than a shade of the north/south divide appeared. Supposedly, a group of the party's Hampstead faithful visited Hartlepool to assess Mandelson's prospects of holding the seat. They decided to 'go native' and sample the local gastronomic delights. Entering a seaside fish shop, one of them with a grasp of the local lingo ordered "cod and chips twice." Another, however, cracked under the proletarian pressure and requested "some of that delicious-looking avocado mousse."

Readers will doubtless have guessed that the finger was pointed at a steaming tub of mushy peas. This fabrication resurfaced in *The Times*, but substituting Mandelson himself for the unnamed champagne socialists. Mandleson denied the claim to the *Hartlepool Mail*: "I regularly eat fish and chips and occasionally mushy peas... [Nobody] would... confuse mushy peas with avocado mousse."

But does he really eat fish and chips? A major profile in the *Mail on Sunday* depicted (in colour) both mushy peas and guacamole for those who might be confused by the difference, under the heading "The Guacamole affair in full," adding: "They said he went to a Hartlepool chippie and pointing at the mushy peas, asked for 'the very excellent guacamole.' He refutes this, saying he's NEVER been in a fish and chip shop in his life." The article was written by former Labour Party deputy leader Roy Hattersley, but I suspect more mischief, as the 'guacamole affair' comments were not borne out in the actual article. Gastronomically-obsessed Hattersley not unsurprisingly began his profile by stating: "It was Peter Mandelson himself... who raised the subject of guacamole, the once-fashionable mixture of crushed avocado, tomatoes, garlic and onions which has become a satirical symbol of New Labour. Stories that he ordered the Mexican delicacy in a Hartlepool fish and chip shop only to be told that he was pointing at mushy peas were, he insisted, totally untrue. But he was clearly not satisfied that his denials had been accepted. Next day, he photocopied and posted an *Economist* article that dealt, extensively, with the history of the guacamole allegation and identified the young American research assistant who had actually made the mistake of which Mandelson had been so unjustly accused."

When *The Observer* profiled Mandelson, it included the avocado/peas story but attempted to put the story into a wider perspective, claiming that something along these lines happened during a by-election in Knowsley North, near Liverpool, during November 1986. Party professionals were there as the local party, angered by having a candidate imposed, boycotted the campaign. Working from a disused office in the run-down wasteland that was Kirby, their only source of quick food was a nearby chippie.

It was all very different from the cossetted home life of Shelley Keeling, daughter of a wealthy East Coast American businessman, who was completing her studies by spending a year in the parliamentary office of Jack Straw. A researcher named Julian Eccles treated himself one day to a takeaway of chips and mushy peas. And guess what? When Keeling saw this fare, her eyes lit up and she exclaimed: "That looks delicious – it must be avocado." Mandelson never set foot in Knowsley, it seems, so how did the tale attach itself to him?

Well, at a social gathering in Blackpool in 1990 to mark Mandelson's departure from his top party post, Leader of the Opposition Neil Kinnock told this very story as if he had witnessed it personally, claiming that it had taken place during a by-election in Brecon in the summer of 1985. The story had been circulating for four years, so what could have prompted Kinnock to misremember the anecdote and connect it with Mandelson? Had he perhaps read it four weeks earlier in *The People?*

The People's political columnist had been playing a game beloved of joumalists: repeating the *Hartlepool Mail* story, knowing it to be untrue, and, by denying it, giving it new life. And who was the columnist spreading this tale? Yes, Black Dog was none other than Mandelson himself. Yet all contemporary legends come full circle and move from fiction to fact. West London's River Cafe phenomenon, a symbol of New Labour referred to as "Tony's canteen" for its ministerial clientele, has Peter Mandelson as a regular. And what speciality is he served? Why, none other than minted mushy peas.

PAUL SCREETON is a Northumberland-based journalist and editor of *Folklore Frontiers.*

Out of Samson's closet

ERIS ANDYS remembers Hollywood in the 1960s – a town in love with all things magical, where actors rubbed shoulders with wizards and the spirit of Jack Parsons lived on.

BACK IN THE 1960S, HOLLYWOOD WAS STILL A FRIENDLY TOWN, teeming with tourists wanting a piece of the new religion, and the new anti-establishment establishment – biker gangs and witches, UFO lovers and swamis – found an open door into the entertainment industry.

In that climate, it took me just eight months to become deputy head of publicity for Fan Fare Films, a B-movie company run by a two-bit mogul complete with cigar. I organised events around the opening of such masterpieces as *Simon, King of The Witches* and *Hell On Wheels*. Before long I was up to my eyeballs in rampaging cultists threatening to torch the set over the slightest doctrinal error.

I could deal with actors who were used to sleeping on camera, but magical practices were something else. I'd become the one who was supposed to see to it that the prop guys and directors didn't offend the spawn of Satan with the wrong gear or incorrect usage of it. Reading books hadn't helped so, to attract the attention of real-life practitioners, I flounced around in a floor length cape and exotic costumes. Not a single wizard of worth approached me.

RONALD GRANT

Then, one day, Harry Dean Stanton (my boyfriend at that time) introduced me to Jack Nicholson. I called him 'Jack of All Trades' because one minute he'd be hammering a set together and the next he'd be in costume playing a part in the film.

One afternoon, Jack and another actor named Jimmy Oliver suggested I go with them to meet "someone special." Evidently, whoever it was wanted to meet me. I was to be 'sorted out' because I'd been running amok with misinformation about the magical arts. I imagined we'd be heading into the Hollywood hills, to a crumbling mansion squeaking with bats; instead, we arrived at a pink bungalow with washing on the line.

The place was a hive of activity. I was guided past the kitchen – which was roped off and filled with hundreds of bottles of every description, each with a cork or stopper – and into the sitting-room where a white-haired man with spit curls was holding court.

This was Samson, and Jack and the others were hanging on his every cryptic word. I had no idea that he had assisted Kenneth Anger with his notorious book, *Hollywood Babylon*, a gruesome exposé of Hollywood's sordid underbelly, or that he had appeared in Anger's cult film, *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*. He turned to me, saying: "I want you to find your character." This meant that Jack and I would go into the costume closet together. I was not entirely sure what this meant. Jack said: "Let's find something for you to wear," which made it sound even more mysterious.

Inside, the deep closet was crammed with every sort of glittering and wonderful costume: animals, Tibetan monsters, grand brocade coats, beaded dresses and frothy clouds of antique lace. Suddenly, I wondered whether it was some sort of peep show. "Jack, what are we *doing* in here?" I asked. "Indulging the old guy," he said, throwing on a gorgeous 18th-century waistcoat. It was all part of transmogrification – or some such. According to Jack, Samson was a devotee of Aleister Crowley.

Finally, I emerged wearing something white with lots of openwork detail. "Gawd, how dreary," said Samson, flicking a limp wrist. "Who are you supposed to be?" I declared myself to be a virgin and that seemed to shut him up. I asked Jack what he saw in all of this; he told me that it interested him, insomuch as it could make things happen.

Changed, I was now fit to be told about the bottle collection in the kitchen. "Well, my dear," said Samson, stroking a fish-shaped example in dark green glass, "every one of these contains an imp, a lesser demon." I asked whether he had ever released any. "Oh, I could never do thaaat," he smirked. I noticed a broken 1950s coke bottle by the sink. Samson and Jack shared a glance, but they weren't about to tell me a thing. Later, Jack said that Samson belonged to a group – which I now have to assume included Jack Parsons – playboy, anti-Christ and missile messiah – which conjured astral beings.

It was all part of the doings of the California Agape Lodge of the sex-magickal group Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO). Evidently, Samson had exceeded the infamous 'Babalon working' of the group; where they wanted to raise a "moon-child" (as in Crowley's novel), Samson was raising demons by the crateload.

It helped explain the connection between Jack and Dennis Hopper. Apparently, Dennis was a friend of Marjorie Elizabeth Cameron, star of *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* and a member of the OTO. In those earlier years, I'd been ignorant about Jack and Dennis and their occult interests; they had Samson and the OTO in common well before they made *Easy Rider* together in 1969.

Soon after, television work presented itself and Jack and I drifted apart. But Jack hadn't given up the odd foray into the costume closet. We met again, in 1988, on Sunset Boulevard. There he was in a lime green leisure suit and RayBans; he must have imagined that it was the perfect disguise. I knew him right away and called out: "Who are you supposed to be, Jack?" There was no answer!

ERIS ANDYS is a script-writer with strong interests in science fiction and forteana.

Blueprints from beyond

Romania has its fair share of strange sites, but **ALAN MURDIE** visited one of the oddest. Castle Hasdeu wasn't merely haunted by the ghostly presence – it was actually designed by one.

ALEXANDER BRUMĂRESCU

The castle was to be a door from this world to the next

SUPERNATURAL FACT AND SUPERNATURAL FICTION TEND TO blur in Romania. Tourist guides don't like to dispel the romance and mystery which Western tourists like to project upon the country's many historic sites. But at Castle Hasdeu, there is no need to invent or re-package any facts. Everyone knows that it owes its very existence to a ghost... or at least something purporting to be the discaranate spirit of an 18-year-old woman.

The Castle is set in the Prahova Valley, and it's easy to miss the ornate, turretted building on the road between Bucharest and the royal spa resort of Sinaia (about an hour and a half's drive from the capital).Constructed from grey and sand coloured blocks,it's not, perhaps, large enough to warrant the name of 'castle'. In fact, 'temple' might be a more suitable term, as its founders saw it as the doorway to another world. What makes it unique in Romania is that every last detail of this strange structure was dictated by a ghost. Castle Hasdeu remains a permanent monument and museum dedicated to life after death and the hitherto secret history of spiritualism in Romania.

The story begins with the poet, linguist and polymath Bogdan Petreicu Hasdeu (1838-1907). Hasdeu was one of Romania's 19th-century intellectual elite – a prolific author of biographies, scientific works, stories, poems and a monumental dictionary of the Romanian language. Hasdeu married in 1865 and his wife gave birth to a daughter, Julia, in 1869. Growing up, Julia displayed all the intellectual gifts of her father and was hailed as a child genius. She could play and compose piano and violin music and was fluent in six languages from her early teens. At the age of 16, she entered the Sorbonne in Paris to study modern languages. But, tragically, Julia's life was cut short by tuberculosis. She died one month before her 19th birthday in 1888.

ALEXANDER BRUMĂRESCU

Hasdeu was profoundly depressed by the loss of his daughter, but six months after her death, while seated in his study, his hand spontaneously began to write messages purporting to come from the departed Julia. The first read: "I am happy. I love you.This should be sufficient. Later more."

More indeed followed, in the form of automatic writings. Amazed by his experiences, Hasdeu sought answers in the literature of psychical research and the then fashionable practice of spiritualism. He studied the works of Allan Kardec, the French founder of spiritism, and Sir William Crookes who, to the detriment of his scientific reputation, had investigated mediums in England. Convinced that communication with the spirit world was a reality, Hasdeu established a spiritualist circle and began research in earnest.

Through both Hasdeu and other mediums, a series of messages came through from an entity identifying itself as Julia. These included communications about the nature of the spirit world, musical compositions and, most importantly, the plans and instructions for the creation of the castle as a permanent channel between this world and the next. Julia's specifications were executed to the letter, resulting in the structure that stands today.

On stepping inside the castle, you enter a series of rooms filled with occult symbolism and mystical meaning. The overall layout follows a pattern: a purely secular room is followed by a room with a spiritual significance, representing simultaneously the separation between this world and the afterlife but also how the passage between one world and another is as simple as moving from one room to the next. The secular rooms are domestic spaces, with period furniture, portraits and momentoes of the Hasdeu family, including one of Julia's childhood dolls. Its perfect condition suggests that it was more an ornament for the precocious Julia than ever a plaything. There is also a library filled with mystical volumes and the works of BP Hasdeu, a room which represents the sacred nature of all knowledge.

The castle's three towers represent the Holy Trinity, but also elements from the religions of Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece, India and Thrace. One tower is called 'Humanity' and symbolises the accumulation of human knowledge, generation after generation, even though it is destined eventually to topple and fall. This collapse will mark the beginning of another civilisation. The central tower room of the castle is circular, with a red domed roof, originally decorated blue and with the 'Eye of God', but now containing a central Y-shaped metal staircase. The shape represents the cup of the Holy Grail and is adorned with a statue of Jesus. The ceiling is decorated with a golden maze

IN SPIRIT: Castle Hasdeu has produced plenty of 'spirit photographs' (left), many of which are now on display in the museum. Below: BP Hasdeu, accompanied by 'Julia', in a painting by Eugeniu Voinescu.

ALEXANDER BRUMĂRESCU

pattern and with stars representing the heavens. The metal stairway connects Earth and sky. A small metal ladder at the base unfolds, allowing you to mount the structure and climb to the upper gallery which runs round the circumference of the dome. Climbing the ladder replicates the ascent to the Cosmos. One cannot help but think, too, of the ladders contained in alchemical symbolism [1] or the ladders and vines by which shamans and priests ascend in the trance state to the heavens.[2]

The Blue Room is now at the back of the building. This was the room used in later years for seances and the materialisation of Julia's spirit and other entities. The colour was chosen from the belief that it was particularly conducive to spirit manifestations. It's noteworthy just how many haunted houses also had 'Blue Rooms' - Borley Rectory, Hinton Ampner in Hampshire, Willington Mill on Tyneside, Ballechin House in Scotland and Calvados Castle in Normandy. [3]

Relics of the seances preserved here include samples of automatic writing. The scripts are in French, the language in which Julia used to write to her father when studying at the Sorbornne. These are preserved in a glass case along with faded photographs taken during some of the seances, revealing light forms which the sitters succeeded in materialising. Equally curious are three triangular stools decorated with a single eye and other occult symbols which were provided as seats for the materialised ghosts to occupy. The guide explains that this was a thoughful gesture made in the interests of the visiting spirits. Having travelled a great distance, it was only to be expected that they would want to sit down and rest! The room also contains a camera obscura which a sceptic might take to be evidence of an elaborate conjuring deceit; equally, the believer might see it as the means of ensuring conditions of darkness and controlling the level of illumination .

It seems improbable that BP Hasdeu would set out to deceive himself; he became so absorbed in spiritist studies that he produced a book on the topic entitled *Sic Cogito*. The Hasdeu seances continued into the 20th century. Julia's mother died in 1902 and Hasdeu himself in 1907. The family had no other direct descendents, but the mounument was maintained as a museum to the poet whose reputation in Romania remained undiminished, his spiritualist beliefs notwithstanding.

It is a miracle in itself that Castle Hasdeu managed to survive the materialistic and profoundly anti-spiritual Ceaucescu era. Unlike many Eastern bloc countries, the Romanian communist regime did not encourage psychical research in any form and the practice of spiritualism was (and still remains) illegal here. But such was Hasdeu's reputation as a writer of national importance that the structure was preserved as a sort of three dimensional biography, representing what the official guidebooks declare were Hasdeu's "declining years". Today, guides recite the facts as they are known from the extensive written records and the site is maintained by the local administration. Approaches by foreign spiritualists to use the building for seances and experiments in mediumship and channelling have been firmly rebuffed. But the centre does hold an annual event commemorating both Hasdeu's spiritualist writings and the messages and inspiration he believed came from his deceased daughter. This is known as the festival of the two Julias – the living Julia and the discarnate one – and the date of 2 July has been picked to commemorate them in a deliberate piece of calendar symbolism.

The Hasdeu seances and scripts have yet to be studied in detail by modern psychical researchers outside Romania. Many mysteries remain concerning the Julia communications, not least as to their source. Was it really the deceased Julia, or was it some kind of extension of the talents of her gifted father? Whilst much communication in spiritualist groups or through channelling is trivial or banal, rarer examples are known where a medium generates works of artistic or literary merit. Certainly the involvement of BP Hasdeu in the mediumship would seem to contradict the notion that channellers "past and present appear to be rather average people." [4]

But while psychic experimentation is today discouraged at Castle Hasdeu, visitors report strange events – including the mysterious fogging of films and anomalous images appearing on photographs. One photographic 'extra' showed up in a picture taken by Ray Watkins of the Ghost Club early in the evening of 17 September, 2000. The rooms of the castle retain different atmospheres, brooding in parts whilst meditative and peaceful in others. Is it simply the wealth of symbolism playing on the unconscious mind, or is it something more ?

REFERENCES

(1) See Colin Wilson, *Mysteries* (1976), p420. Carl Jung in his writings on alchemy also identified the ladder symbol. See CJ Jung, *Collected Works* vols 1-18.

(2) Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1964), Pantheon Books, New York. Eliade himself was of Romanian origin.

(3) Noted by Harry Price in *The End of Borley Rectory* (1945), and *Poltergeist Over England* (1946).

(4) See JM Decuypere, 'Channelling: Sick or Scientific' in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* (1999), Vol 63 No 856 at 193.

A special conference on the paranormal and life after death "Communications with the Beyond" is to be held at Sinaia, Romania between 10-12 May 2002. For further details contact Nicolae Paduraru at cdt@art.ro

PLEASE SEND SUBMISSIONS TO 'FORTEAN TRAVELLER' AT THE EDITORIAL ADDRESS OR EMAIL TO DAVID.SUTTON@IFGMAGS.COM

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letters

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GHOST CAR

Paul Devereux's article on ghost roads **[*FT153:36-40*]** brought to mind an experience of mine. When I was in college I often had trouble sleeping and went for nocturnal drives. One night, I left the house at 11pm and drove through an old industrial area of Cincinnati. I noticed a white car behind me which I found disturbing. I drove on and it didn't follow, but a mile up the road I saw the same car, now facing me. I realised that what I found disturbing was that the car was plainly visible, but the headlights were off and looked black. I turned around to head home, but the car showed up behind me once more before I arrived. I thought I had been out half an hour, but the clock showed 3am. I put the matter behind me until I read in one of Whitley Streiber's alien abduction books about lost time and people seeing things their minds couldn't accept and visualising them as owls or vehicles. While I don't buy the abduction business, the whole matter remains disturbing to me.

WALDEN CURTIS
Cincinnati, Ohio

QUATERMASS AND ROSWELL

I've just seen again the classic Hammer version of *Quatermass and the Pit*. When the Martian capsule is cracked open, the scientists remove insect-like corpses from the object and perform a rough-and-ready post mortem.

It struck me that this was alarmingly similar (in both content and on a literal, shot-for-shot basis) to the Roswell autopsy footage. We have shots of an alien being cut open by scalpel, followed by a quick-cut set of scenes as organs are dumped at random in jars and dishes. Then Professor Q removes a thin filmy layer from one of the creatures' eyes with a set of tweezers, just as in the intensely unpleasant "real" version.

Do readers think this is the source material that 'they' were working from (if you see what I mean)?

DAN HIGGINBOTTOM
by email

EDVARD MUNCH

On the evening of 8 December 2001, BBC2 broadcast a documentary called *Private Life of a Masterpiece* about Edvard Munch's 1893 painting 'The Scream.' The main inspiration for the programme seems to have been an experience that Munch recorded in his diary in 1892:

"I was walking along the road with two friends. The sun set. I felt a tinge of melancholy. Suddenly the sky became a bloody red. I stopped, leaned against the railing, dead tired, and I looked at the flaming clouds that hung like blood and a sword over the blue-black fjord and the city. My friends walked on. I stood there, trembling with fright. And I felt a loud, unending scream piercing nature."

It sounds an awful lot like the stuff written about by Patrick Harpur in his 'The Landscape of Panic' article in ***FT141:30***, and the subsequent letters in ***FT144:52*** and ***FT153:54***.

JUSTIN ANSTEY
Longhope, Gloucestershire

BELIEVING THE PROTOCOLS

It is incorrect to say that Tsar Nicholas II eventually determined that the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was fabricated and rejected it **[*FT154:37*]**. The last diaries of Nicholas II and Tsarina Alexandra show clearly that Nilus' book was one of the few that they took with them into internal exile after Nicholas was forced to abdicate, and that he was still reading aloud extracts from it to his family within weeks of their assassination.

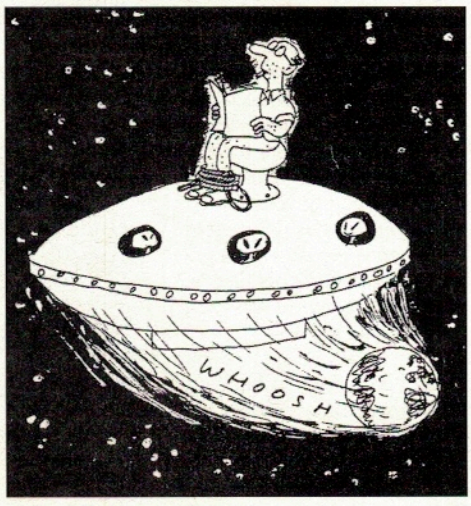
In a diary entry of 27 March 1918, the ex-Tsar even calls the *Protocols* "very timely reading matter". [See Mark D Steinberg and Vladimir M Khrustalev (eds): *The Fall of the Romanovs*, Yale University Press 1995, page 241.] The Tsarina's diary also comments approvingly on the book's content, and a copy of it was found among her abandoned possessions after she was assassinated at Ekaterinburg [Steinberg and Khrustalev, 404 note 91.]

DR DOMINIC MONTSERRAT
London

THE RAILWAY CHILDREN

Regarding the letter from Roger Morgan **[*FT154:55*]** about something slithering over the wall at the end of *The Railway Children* film: he may have been writing from memory, as he has in fact telescoped two 'final sequences'. The incident he describes actually occurs as the three children walk away from the cottage towards the railway embankment, whereas the "full face" footage comes at the very end when the credits are rolling. What actually happens during the first sequence is that one moment the children are walking longshot through very naturalistic scenery and the next they are shown in closeup against a more contrived-looking background, part of which collapses. Sadly, there is no 20ft [6m] amœba slithering over a wall. Instead, a portion of foliage falls from a tree, strikes the wall and tumbles to the ground, possibly dislodged by a bird as something then rises from the ground to the wall. I ran the sequence in slow motion and also backwards, and the falling branch is clearly visible.

MIKE MARTIN
Wheathampstead, Hertfordshire



JORODO

As to mysterious things seen in the background of feature films being "an entirely new fortean topic", haven't your pages featured the "ghost" in *Three Men and a Baby*? (Actually a cardboard cut-out of one of the stars, Ted Danson). And what about the urban legend that one of the actors playing a Munchkin in *The Wizard of Oz* commits suicide during a scene in the film?

DAN BIGMORE
Southend-on-Sea, Essex

SUPER-SINISTER

I was greatly intrigued to read Norman Brooks's letter **[*FT148:55*]** about a feeling of oppression he and his son experienced while walking the Somme battlefield near the village of Serre in 1991, for there are excellent written historical precedents for such a feeling of unease at this site. Anyone who has ever lit a candle at the great French ossuary-shrine at Verdun will be aware of the ghostly potential of the Great War. Yet, for some reason, this potential is concentrated around the fortified village of Serre.

A H Farrer-Hockley (*The Somme* Pan-Grand Strategy, 1983), p244) says that CR Crutwell, in his 1934 book A History of the Great War, 1914–1918, "aptly" describes the last of the cruel Somme fortresses as "the sinister ruins of Serre".

It seems bizarre, amid the carnage of the Battle of the Somme, to single out a particular village as having a sinister quality, especially when the reasons behind such quality of location are never explained in print. One can only assume that Crutwell or Farrer-Hockley once experienced whatever Norman Brooks and his son experienced in 1991, near the sinister village of Serre.

NICK WARREN
Pinner, Middlesex

MARMITE HOOCH

I write regarding the mythchaser query on Marmite in HM Prisons **[*FT155:28*]**. While I'm not sure if it is banned from some prisons, I do know for a fact that it's used in the fermenting of prison booze. I can recall an acquain-

tance of mine telling me about the foul-tasting mixture being brewed under beds and behind radiator pipes in a category C prison he was holidaying in. Yeast is banned from most prisons due to the obvious opportunities for abuse it allows. This I know for a fact because of the amount of effort said acquaintance went to smuggle some in.

MARK PHILLIPS
by email

Editor's note: According to a BBC news report on 9 January 2002, inmates at Featherstone jail near Wolverhampton were brewing their own hooch using Marmite because its yeast content aids the fermenting process. Fruit and vegetables were also being used to make alcoholic drinks by prisoners at the jail. The original Marmite Food Company was founded in 1902 at Burton-on-Trent in East Staffordshire. It formed part of the staple diet for the armed forces in both world wars because it is rich in vitamin B.

EVILS OF PSYCHIATRY

Regarding the Hierophant's entry on the Church of Scientology [*FT152:66*]: anyone who has spoken, as I have, to hundreds of people who have had their lives destroyed by psychiatric mind-altering drugs, large voltages of electricity blasted through their brains, or had their brains butchered by lobotomy, would tend to have a negative view of the proponents of such barbarisms.

Fortean Times regularly makes reference to Charles Fort's observation that, in science, "inconvenient data was ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away." Psychiatry is notorious for this, with no scientific evidence whatsoever to warrant the "treatments" they inflict – as stated by many critics, even from within their own ranks. Thomas Szasz, Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry, wrote in 1994 that psychiatry is "the single most destructive force that has affected society within the last 50 years." And, yes, that does include Nazi Germany and the concentration camps that were created by psychiatrists and used by them on mental patients, the disabled and other "undesirables" before the idea was sold to Hitler of using them as the "final solution." All based on psychiatrist Ernst Rudin's theories of "ethnic cleansing" (later used in the Balkans).

The New York Times reported in the wake of 11 September, "Though many religious organisations are supplying assistance for the disaster, few are as well organised as the Scientologists, or as evident at the scene."

GRAEME WILSON
Public Affairs Director, Church of Scientology, East Grinstead, West Sussex

SIMULACRA CORNER

This stone head was photographed at Carn Gloose near Cape Cornwall by Annie Parry of Worksop, Nottinghamshire, who sees it as a lioness.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the editorial post box (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) and we'll pay a fiver or ten dollars for any we use.

A NORMANDY TALE

A few miles west of Dieppe, in the woods above a cove, stands a small chateau, reputed to have been many things in its time, including the Wehrmacht headquarters in World War II. It is certainly an intriguing building, impressive without being imposing. If you make your way out of the back of the building and into the woods, you soon find a little stream that emerges after a few hundred metres onto a small beach. Like so many Normandy beaches, this one has a little sand and a lot of pebbles, and it is most likely to be empty, with just the sound of the waves breaking and perhaps the wind stirring the trees above. The once-busy port lies a few kilometres to the east, and to the west there is the lighthouse on the headland.

I have twice visited the chateau during its spell as a residential centre for British schoolchildren, a role it has now ceased to fulfil. On my first stay, in the summer of 1981, I ended up sharing a room with a male teacher called Richard from a school in London. The pair of us, though strangers, were content with the arrangement, and as we were both fully occupied during the day, were keen on a good night's sleep whenever we could get it.

The second night was warm and the casement was open, a little breeze stirring the curtains as we dropped off to sleep around 11 o'clock. I was woken by a noise about an hour later. I thought at first that the window had banged in the breeze, but the breeze had dropped, and the partly-drawn curtains were still. Then I heard the noise again, not close at all, but seeming to come from the woods beyond the chateau, or maybe even further away. It was a single loud bang, like a gunshot, and then, half a minute later, another. Poachers! I thought. I slipped back towards sleep, maybe for less than a minute, then I was wide-awake again.

The single shots, for shots they surely were, were now coming more often, and in between there were bursts of machine-gun fire. It seemed no nearer, but it was louder, and appeared to come from several different places at once. Surely this could not be poachers, but in that case what was it? Now I could tell that Richard was awake too.

"What's all that?" he murmured.

"I don't know. Listen, do you think those are guns?"

"Sounds like it, doesn't it? But who's doing the shooting?"

"I've no idea."

We lay and listened. The sound grew but came no nearer, then it seemed to grow distant. Perhaps a wind was rising and blowing the sounds away? No, the curtains didn't stir, there was no noise of vehicles, no police sirens, no sound of commotion in the rooms around us.

At breakfast, there was no talk of war, battles in the night, or of any disturbance at all. According to the teachers, even the children had had a quiet night, something they found remarkable in itself. I had expected anxious talk of evacuation and concerns for our safety, but it started to dawn on me that nobody else had heard a thing. I caught Richard in the lobby before his party left for the day.

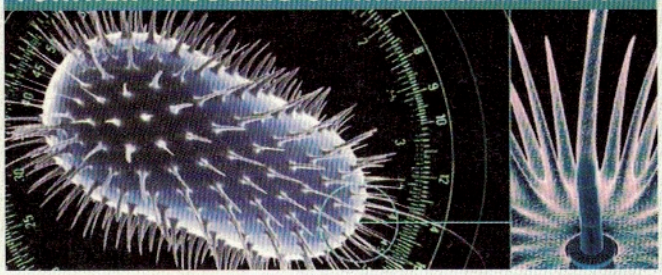
"So, have you spoken to anybody yet?" I asked.

"Yes, and I got a very strange reaction from the housekeeper, as though she had seen a ghost. Nobody else heard anything. So far it's just you and me that seem to know anything about all this at all."

When I told the organiser of the school trip on my return to England, she said that the stretch of coast nearby had had a turbulent history, and was the scene of a fierce battle during World War II. I looked this up in a history book and discovered that on 19 August 1942, a force of 5,000 Canadians, 1,000 British and 50 American Rangers attempted to take and hold the port of Dieppe. The raid was a high-risk operation and turned out to be a disaster. Of the 5,000 troops who got ashore, more than half were killed or captured, and the beach below our wood was a scene of very heavy fighting.

DAVID DOUGHTY
Loughborough, Leicestershire

FURTHER THOUGHTS ON INTELLIGENT DESIGN



I found Vicki Ecker's article on Intelligent Design (ID) **[FT154:30-33]** thought-provoking, but it ought to be noted that criticisms of neo-Darwinism do not have to promote ID as the only alternative. I personally think the greatest wonder in the history of ideas is the establishment of neo-Darwinism as a virtually unchallengeable dogma. The only principles that neo-Darwinists (may) admit to in Nature are natural selection of random mutations and adaptation; but if this is all that is going on, then it is difficult for me to understand some of the developments which organisms have hit upon in their efforts to just reproduce.

What is the selective advantage to the eels of Comacchio, in the east of Italy, in travelling all the way to the Sargasso Sea as part of their life cycle, or to the parasite Ascaris in migrating all the way around its host's body instead of settling directly in the stomach where it belongs? Or why, when a horse manages well enough with just one stomach has it proved of survival value for a cow, of similar size and diet, to evolve four?

I also see zero evidence to support the basic Darwinian tenet that evolution in the sense of progression from less to more complex organisms was to do with better adaptation or production of greater offspring. Adaptation is possible at any level and the rabbit, the herring or even the bacterium are all unsurpassed in their reproductive capacities. Indeed, were they not as well adapted as just about anything, then they would have lost out in the struggle for survival long ago. Bacteria comprise more than 50 per cent of all living things and thrive in even the most extreme environments. Why then should a blue whale be regarded as the beneficiary of a better evolutionary deal?

And how does adaptation explain the fantastic metamorphoses in the life cycle of the butterfly, from egg to a grub which spins itself into a chrysalis, where it undergoes a complete transformation involving the dissolution of all of its organs and tissues and then their remoulding into a winged adult? Books on natural history have innumerable examples of such far-fetched ways of making a living as a species, but they are rarely mentioned in theoretical works on Darwinism because they reveal too glaringly that the theory begs the vital questions.

And the whole idea of natural selecting from just whatever offerings genetic mutation may serve up has troubled many people. Professor R Riedl of the Zoology Department of Vienna University was incredulous at the neo-Darwinian dogma that a creature makes useful alterations to itself via a process which allows it no information feedback from its environment. He found the doctrine that it achieves the correct response just by the selection of chance mutations "as unlikely as the enhancement of a good poem by a printer's error".

There are many other major problems with the theory, but public discussion of them is difficult because many people who regard themselves as rationalists have taken aboard the unconscious acceptance of the necessity of neo-Darwinism since it accompanies their other assumptions, i.e. that science concerns itself only with the visible material Universe. A reductionist science must defend natural selection and adaptation as the only mechanisms involved. Were it to do otherwise, then something stupendous and quite unexplained would have to be accepted as part of Nature.

So Professor Stephen Pinker has written that natural selection is the only non-miraculous process that could account for the development of life, and George Botterill, Professor of Philosophy at Sheffield University, told me: "It is a necessary truth! It must be true!"

In his medical column from *The Daily Telegraph* of September 1999, James le Fanu dissented from the opinion expressed by his fellow columnist Professor Steve Jones that "Everyone not determined to stay ignorant believes in evolution."

Dr le Fanu would argue the reverse and added that the more he understood even "the most elementary aspects of human biology, the less compelling I find Darwin's theory of natural selection." He found it very difficult for natural selection to account for human body hair ceasing to grow beyond a certain length when head hair will grow up to a metre long. Likewise it did not seem to him to "explain virtually any unique aspect of the human organism – the size of the brain, the positioning of the sexual organs, the prominence of the female breasts, the delicacy of the nails and so on."

He concluded: "It is often said – and Prof. Jones makes the point – that, despite such problems, we have to embrace Darwinism as, besides Creationism, there is simply no alternative mechanism to explain the infinite diversity and variety of life on this planet. I would suggest, rather, that we really do not know the answers and, perhaps, never will."

Amen.

For me no adequate answers exist for the sorts of points here raised, and, therefore, I have to agree with Dr le Fanu's diagnosis. Neo-Darwinists are not defenders of rationality. Rather, like all others who embrace a creation myth, they are just whistling in the dark. But if you want to posit a Designer, then we want to know what designed that Designer. And if your response is that it is something somehow beyond time and space, then we should concede that we have probably reached the limits of human intelligence.

JAMES PLASKETT
Hastings, East Sussex

Ecker's article did a good job discussing why ID is suspicious in terms of American rules about teaching religion in public schools. However, she missed the deeper objection scientists have to Intelligent Design – accepting such a premise would turn them from researchers to art critics.

If a biologist looks at a biological system, such as a bacterial flagella or a bird's wing, with the starting hypothesis that it evolved naturally, there are plenty of things he can do to occupy his time. He can look for similar structures in existing species to see what the range of possibilities are. He can look in the fossil record for older but similar structures to figure out how the system evolved. He can (lately) find the genes that build that structure and look even farther afield for similar genes doing other jobs in other species. He has a whole tool kit of approaches to poke at the system and learn things about it.

Someone who attempts to do research with ID as a starting point, on the other hand, is stuck. He has no particular reason to think that looking at similar structures, fossils or genes will shed any light on this wing or this flagella – an Intelligent Designer could just as well have made the whole thing up from scratch. The only kind of comment an ID researcher can reasonably make is something like "beautiful plumage." There's no way to define and solve a specific research problem, because who are we to say what an Intelligent Designer would be up to? Even the best-credentialed advocates of ID, such as Doctors Behe and Dembski, do not use ID as a basis for concrete research programmes of their own. They just write pop-level books advocating ID as a sort of vague generality.

The most annoying thing about ID, to me, is that Behe and Dembski specify that nothing can be learned about the Intelligent Designer him/her/it/themselves by studying the parts of nature dubbed intelligently designed. Otherwise, what ID lacks in practical scientific value could be made up for in fortean fun. If bacterial flagella are really well designed, while other biological systems like the human lower back or knee are complete jury-rigs, does the designer like bacteria more than humans? What can we say about the proximity of cheetahs, well-designed to run down antelope and eat them half-alive, to antelope who are designed to outrun cheetahs so the cheetahs starve to death? Are there two designers, one for prey and one for predators, or is a single rather sadistic designer having a bet on the outcome? ID advocates dodge these kinds of questions.

LOUANN MILLER
Waxahachie, Texas

TUTBURY SPECTRE

When I was a mature student at the University of Derby, I visited Tutbury in Staffordshire on 4 March 1993 to do a bit of documentary work for my photographic studies degree. The day was cold and overcast, and I was afraid that everything I photographed would turn out grey and flat. Around midday I took this picture looking down Duke Street with a good view of the castle ruins on the skyline. I took four other shots, visited a café and went home.

When I developed the frame shown here, I noticed a curious triangular shape like a bottle skip in the middle of the road. I showed it to the student working next to me, and we agreed it looked like a figure wearing a black cape. Enlarged, it looked like a cleric in a flowing cape and wearing a tall hat like a bishop's mitre, walking along the white line. [Editor's note: the 'hat' appears to me to be part of a pedestrian behind the mysterious shape.] The figure is missing on the next frame, taken a second or so later, as long as it takes to wind on a frame on a manual Pentax. It is arguably again visible further down the road behind a bus two frames later.

A figure in flowing robes walking down a village street free at the time of religious ceremonies or historical re-enactments would surely have been highly noticeable. I wrote to the vicar of Tutbury with a copy of the photograph. He duly wrote back commenting that the figure *might* have been him, but couldn't imagine what he would have been doing walking along the white line of what is a pretty busy road.

Tutbury has a long and exceptional history. Mary Queen of Scots was imprisoned there and it was a Royalist stronghold in the Civil War, which resulted in the castle being partially demolished on Cromwell's orders afterwards. A bull-running ceremony dating back to the time of John of Gaunt and Constantia of Castile continued for many centuries. But I still think the figure looks like a bishop, and there's no connection there that I know of.

BRENDA RAY
Derby

BANGING IN THE CHAPEL

In 1973 I taught at Clouds House school in East Noyle, Wiltshire. Clouds House had been built for the Wyndham family in the 19th century. I had the job of prowling along the corridors to ensure all was safe and none of the pupils was gliding about on nocturnal jaunts. The cellars consisted of a long passage with five rooms leading off it on either side, used for drying laundry. The only light came from a naked bulb on the landing in front of the locked double doors of the old chapel, which was used as a storeroom.

One frosty November night, I was inspecting the cellars when there was violent beating on the chapel doors from the inside. The doors vibrated under the pounding and, thinking there was someone inside, I ran towards the doors, but the beating stopped when I got there. I tried to open the doors but the padlock was securely in place. I asked if there was anyone inside, but there was no reply.

The next day I casually followed the bursar to the cellar and while she was there, I wandered round the interior of the chapel. The small windows were firmly locked and barred as they were at ground level. No one would have been able to get into the chapel even if they had broken the glass and removed the bars. The glass was intact, so there was no question of draughts either. Besides, the action on the doors had been too violent for a draught.

IAN WOODROW
Poole, Dorset

RIPPER ASSERTIONS

Under the heading "Common Misconceptions about Jack the Ripper" **[*FT*155:46]**, there are a number of unproven – indeed unprovable – assertions. That the murders did not occur just on foggy nights I concede, as the weather conditions would be ascertainable recorded fact. However, consider the other statements.

He was not left-handed. All we "know" is that the throats of the victims were cut, often in a left-to-right direction. But we don't know whether the attacks were carried out from behind or from the front. Either way, the Ripper could have been a left-hander pretending to be right-handed.

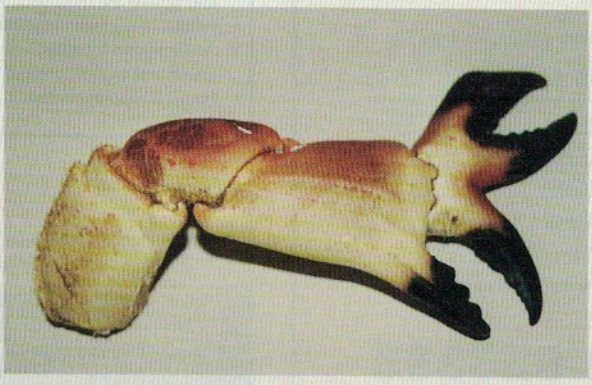
He did not wear a top hat/cape, carry a black bag. I have notes of 12 witness descriptions – and could probably find more if I looked through my 50+ books on the subject – covering a variety of headgear, outerwear and luggage. Admittedly, none of these specifically mention top hat, cape or black bag, but there is no proof that any of those men were actually Jack.

He did not write the infamous letter signed "Jack the Ripper". While it is broadly accepted that the bulk (if not all) of the letters signed "Jack the Ripper" were from crackpots and in certain cases (the "Dear Boss" letters to the Central News Agency) the writer has been tentatively identified as a journalist, to say that the writer was not Jack implies that we know that the journalist wasn't the killer, which further implies that we know who the killer was.

He was not a member of the Royal family, nor a physician to the Royal household. As before, knowing who he wasn't implies knowledge of who he was.

CP DEAN
Redbridge, Essex

MUTANT CLAW



This double claw from an otherwise normal Atlantic brown crab was given to me by my sister-in-law last October. She works at Errigal Eisc Teo, a fish factory in Co. Donegal, Ireland. The crab was caught in the Irish Sea by a boat hailing from Co. Down. My father, who has fished for the best part of 50 years, says he has never seen anything like it.

COGHAN MAC GUIBHIR
Carrick, Co. Donegal

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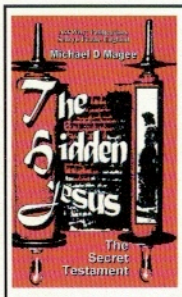

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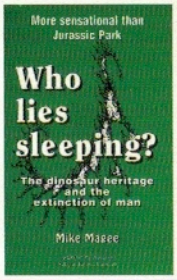

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"Nothing in religion, science or philosophy is more than the proper thing to wear for a while"
Charles Fort

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REVIEW RATINGS RANGE FROM 0 TO 10

UFOLOGY AND THE UNIVERSITY

The myth of typical UFO believer as the slack-jawed contactee takes an academic beating

THE LURE OF THE EDGE

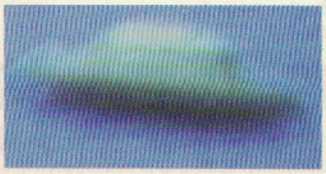
SCIENTIFIC PASSIONS, RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, AND THE PURSUIT OF UFOS

BRENDA DENZLER

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, BERKELEY, 2001
HB, 295PP, $35.00
ISBN 0 520 22432 9

A few years ago a publisher sent me a manuscript for review. It consisted of papers, written mostly by psychologists and sociologists and previously published in academic journals, on the UFO subculture. All of the contributors, it goes without saying, came from outside it. (Academic journals seldom welcome contributors from inside the subculture.) Before then, I had had some notion of the shortcomings of "scholarship" in this area, but the experience of reading a whole bunch of it at one time was revelatory. The ufology depicted in these papers was not one that I, who have spent my life in it, recognised remotely.

In *The Lure of the Edge*, which gets it right at last, Brenda Denzler candidly concedes that shoddy pseudoscholarship has long dominated academic writing about ufologists and their concerns. Interestingly, she blames the influential sociological text *When Prophecy Fails*, which recorded the zany antics of a tiny, short-lived contactee group. That same year, she points out, saw the publication of Edward J Ruppelt's insider history of the US Air Force's investigations, *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*. "It is one of the enduring ironies of the UFO movement," Denzler says, "that the academic world has paid more attention to a book about a channeler of extraterrestrial messages than the memoirs of a main actor in the early UFO debate." Reading the resulting literature,



"one might well conclude that those who believe in UFOs are socially marginal characters" in slack-jawed thrall to contactees promising imminent salvation from space. "This impression is mistaken," she declares. That will be no news to most reading this review, but a startling proposition to most academic readers who find their way to this fine book.

To Denzler, ufology is, at its core, an intellectually serious enterprise which asks real, if unorthodox and difficult, questions. It is not reducible to "pseudoscience" nor to social pathology, and its most thoughtful participants in no way correspond to hackneyed stereotypes of illiterate cranks, money-grubbing exploiters, or breathless conspiracy theorists. The impressively thorough bibliography documents the degree to which she has done her homework, and her coverage of UFO history and of the internal debates within ufology is refreshingly, sometimes even thrillingly, on target.

She is not much impressed, either, with ufology's critics, remarking dryly, "Debunkers gradually made it clear to ufology that there were no conceivable circumstances under which students of the UFO phenomenon could present a convincing case." Though few knowledgeable debunkers are scientists, and few scientists know much about the UFO phenomenon, the latter have depended on the former to keep a troublesome question at bay. Thus, Denzler writes, debunkers have "functioned as gatekeepers between ufology and the scientific world."

Her principal interest, however, is in the tension between science and religion in ufology. This is not to say, as this sociologist of religion makes clear, that ufology (as opposed to the saucerian movement of the contactees) is merely a form of religion. It isn't. But by its nature it cannot help

UFOLOGY IS, AT ITS CORE, A SERIOUS ENTERPRISE

confronting – however much it may desire otherwise – the sort of question with which religion has traditionally dealt: the experience of the otherworldly, the numinous, the transcendent. The question arises across the range of UFO experience, from the sighting of a strange flying object which shakes the observer's previously mundane worldview to an abductee's shattering face-to-face encounter with intelligent, nonearthly entities.

Of course, she is careful to add, that sort of "religious" impulse also manifests in scientists who, like the ufologists who have never encountered UFOs themselves, share an "ability to believe in the existence of things not yet seen with their own eyes," specifically intelligent extraterrestrial beings near or distant. To others, though, faith is not an issue "because they had been given a direct experience of the very thing that everyone else was still looking for."

Denzler devotes a good chunk of the book to the abduction phenomenon which has forced secular ufologists to consider the complex implications and dynamics, some "inscrutable by traditional scientific methods," of direct human-nonhuman interaction. At the same time, she acknowledges, the ontological status of abductions is much debated within ufology, and she fairly represents the views of others (including me) who have argued for a conservative – and, yes, materialist – approach, focused on cases (notably CE2s) on which actual science can be conducted. Still, she is perfectly justified in arguing that like it or not, ufologists, by the nature of the experiences they investigate and theorise about, find themselves in a no man's land where scientists fear – and may be unable – to tread.

Lure, perhaps inevitably, contains some errors. One is the assertion that Donald Keyhoe's January 1950 *True* article was the first on "flying saucers" to appear in a "popular periodical." Not true; Sidney Shallett's two-part "What You Can Believe About Flying Saucers" was featured in *Saturday Evening Post* on 30 April and 7 May 1949. Demonologist-ufologist Ann Druffel is not a "psychologist," nor is ancient-astronaut theorist Robert Temple an "astronomer." The humanoids who came seeking a New Jersey farmer's dog almost certainly never existed outside a prankster's imagination. The well-travelled ninth-century Magonia legend has nothing to do with UFO abductions, contrary claims by a prominent UFO author notwithstanding. These are minor complaints.

The Lure of the Edge ought to be read by anyone with an intelligent curiosity about its subject. The reader is likely to agree that if UFOs continue to resist scientific explanation, they are no longer escaping productive academic examination. Let's hope that this book sparks a trend.

JEROME CLARK

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT

A REWARDING AND ERUDITE (RE)VIEW OF UFOLOGY **9**

PC GAMES

AQUANOX

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£29.99

A sci-fi game set, for a nice change, in a futuristic underwater world, *Aquanox* is a sequel to 1996's *Archimedean Dynasty*. It's 2666, and the human race has retreated from a now uninhabitable surface to the depths of the world's oceans. You are a submarine commander caught between warring political factions, powerful corporations, dangerous pirates and the mysterious 'bionts'. Voyaging through this undersea world, you spend time in various cities and 'stations' where you can re-equip your ship, talk to the locals and pick up information to aid your missions. All of this is pretty static - but when you get out and about in your ship, things become more enjoyable. The graphics are highly impressive; iridescent lights and glowing plankton swirl around you, creating a gorgeous undersea world. Spending too long admiring the scenery is a dangerous business, though, and mastering the art of underwater warfare is not an easy matter. Ultimately, more satisfying as a subaquatic shooter than yet another sci-fi dystopia.

DAVID SUTTON

COMPETITION

Thanks to JoWooD, we have five copies of *Aquanox* to give away to readers who can tell us:

WHICH DIRECTOR'S FINAL FILM FEATURED VINCENT PRICE AND DAVID TOMLINSON INVESTIGATING AN UNDERSEA KINGDOM OFF THE COAST OF CORNWALL?

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REMOTE VIEWING

WHAT IT IS, WHO USES IT, AND HOW TO DO IT

TIM RIFAT

VISION PAPERBACKS, 2001
PB, 278PP, IND, 'REFS' (!), BIB, £9.99
ISBN 1 901250 96 2

Remote Viewing is something of a hot topic these days, and any book claiming to tell you How To Do It is bound for success. It is also bound for a sceptical reception. Rifat has written a clear and concise survey of his subject, and Vision is to be congratulated for its continued mission to venture into such territory.

Unfortunately, Rifat's book disappoints on two counts. First, much of it is essentially a rewrite of his *Remote Viewing: the History and Science of Psychic Warfare and Spying* (Century, 1999) – and not all that rewritten, either (though at least it has an index this time). Secondly, it suffers from what must be described as over-confidence. Thus, in the very first chapter, we learn that clairvoyant ability has been an evolutionary asset to humankind, enabling us to find water in drought and so on. Checking the footnote for this massive assertion, one finds that "Bushmen in the Kalahari and Aboriginal shamen still exhibit this skill." And that's it. A subject that would require several books in itself, simply whacked into the discourse without so much as a 'by-your-leave'. Chutzpah is one thing, but this just will not do.

Further on we find ourselves invited to consider vaguely-defined 'Tesla-coil' devices employed in the former Soviet Union as anti-RV safeguards that effectively 'bottle' the RV-er's roving awareness. There is simply no evidence for this; and since we have also been assured that the RV experience is essentially an OOBE, one is left wondering what happens to the viewer whose 'astral body' (or whatever) has been 'bottled'. Furthermore, some hint of how to avoid this nasty fate when following Mr Rifat's RV protocols would be nice.

Some of the claims given are so spurious that they invite scorn: if such a thing as untraceable telekinetic killing is really practised by intelligence agencies, then why do they so often resort to guns, car-crashes, and other hardware, when one sociopathic RV-er could topple an empire? (And, more topically, why weren't they used to 'get' Osama bin Laden?)

This is the book's fatal flaw. Time and again, hot air is given the appearance of solidity through straight-faced assertion: if Mr Rifat has evidence and/or sources, where and what are they? Whole sections of the text read very scientifically, but are not referenced at all, and are therefore next to useless. By the same token, half the references that are provided are to articles in *Nexus* magazine (this reviewer has nothing against said publication, but, at the same time, would hope for some, ahem, peer-reviewed sources. Hell, one footnote directs the reader to the baffling 'From Russia With Anxiety' [*FT87:28*] – but without, apparently, being aware of the curious footnote to this affair). One reference, hilariously, reads '*Fortune* (no more details available)'. '*Sightings*', 'internet posting by I[nigo?] Swann', '*Sunday Times* (no more details available)'… Oh dear.

And the How To Do It bit? Well, it's clear, lucid, and well-explained, and this in itself – being a leakage of the framework of RV training costing thousands of dollars – is enough to redeem the rest of the book and make it worth buying. Your reviewer couldn't get anywhere with it, though. But I must admit that I don't actually want to spy on anything in the first place, and I didn't spend very much time on trying (from the guidelines given, it has to be the work of months). So perhaps I'm just a poor subject. But, overall, the only remote viewing initiated by my reading of this misfire of a book was my gazing mournfully out of the window, wondering when the pub would open. Mr Rifat's guidelines might work for you – and I'll be delighted to hear from you if they do, provided you can prove it by telling me what I have hanging above my PC.

GARRICK ALDER

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT
BEST VIEWED REMOTELY... **4**

THE A.T. FACTOR

PIECES FOR A JIGSAW PART 3

LEONARD CRAMP

ADVENTURES UNLIMITED, 2001
PB, 324PP, IND, $16.95
ISBN 0 932813 92 5

As an aerodynamicist of genius, engineer Leonard Cramp produced fairy things – half-forms almost from another world – that hopped, skipped, jumped (and sometimes even flew), often in defiance of the laws of Faraday and Newton. Prophets of certainty who happened to be standing near, were astonished when some impossible thing swooped and manœuvered. But any hero who makes claims for "Paranormally related aerospace technological developments" and writes four books about a kind of technological mysticism, is bound to run into big Anglo-Saxon Trouble very quickly.

Cramp suffered vicious put-downs from lesser men while the modern equivalents to Leonardo's futuristic drawings poured from his head. As with the engineer Eric Laithwaite, some of Cramp's "damned" devices worked, some did not, and some worked partially, earning a visit from our old fortean friend, the partial explanation. Others, like John Worrell Keely's machines, earned no explanation at all.

Cramp was unfortunate in being born in a country that hates genius (particularly technological genius) with an almost religious hatred. In America, Cramp would have been given a blank cheque, but in Britain he was – like Alan Turing, Barnes Wallace, and Alan Bond – ritually crucified. Similarly, British small-minded pre-industrial village scepticism also nearly lost us the tank, radar, and the Spitfire, in addition to causing the shameful national disasters of the Somme and Dunkirk. The Unforgivable Sin in a doubting WASP culture is to blend technological genius with visionary mysticism. To add to his problems, Cramp had a mind which ignored distinctions between fact and fiction. This, and his claimed UFO experiences, made him a perfect target for sceptics.

Like George Adamski, Uri Geller (and, indeed, Lee Harvey Oswald), Cramp's wild talents enabled him to walk through 20th century walls on occasion with no problem at all. Like Adamski, again, Cramp defeated that arriviste imposter called the Real and in one lifetime, no man can do better than that. This is a most rare and brilliant book about a British techno-scientific mind and its troubled schizoid relationship to antediluvian British culture, a decayed scientific establishment, and also an almost forgotten something that D H Lawrence called the condition of the British soul. Lawrence would have agreed that Cramp's brave and somewhat anarchic life was also a kind of definition of poetry. Certainly this is a book for the fortean connoisseur.

COLIN BENNETT

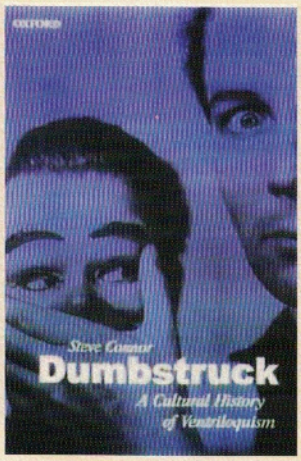
FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT
GRIPPING, MYSTICAL AND VISIONARY **8**

DUMBSTRUCK

A CULTURAL HISTORY OF VENTRILOQUISM

STEVEN CONNOR

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2000
HB, 458PP, IND, BIB, ILLUS, £25.00
ISBN 0198184336



I was much taken by the episodic film *Dead of Night* when I first saw it as a child in the early 1960s. It is the story, directed by Alberto Cavalcanti, of the ventriloquist Maxwell Frere (superbly played by Michael Redgrave) and his alter ego, the evil doll Hugo Fitch.

The notion of transferring a voice and some movement into a model of a human being continues to fascinate. The idea of that model absorbing a form of life through the ritual of performance and audience acceptance runs through much fiction and alleged fact (sacred dolls, miracle statues *et al*). At a more superficial level, I was equally intrigued by the possibility of learning how to "throw" one's voice, as so graphically advertised in the comics of the day – fooling friends and teachers, along with other japes, was the harmless end of the spectrum…

More recently, while travelling in Mexico, I was advised by friends in England that a certain Edwardian ventriloquist's doll (to whom I had already been introduced) was, surprisingly, being advertised for sale.

When I returned home and found him waiting, I asked what his name was, to which he promptly replied: "Roy". "Roy what?" I managed to enquire. "Just Roy," he snapped back. Now, whilst this conversation almost certainly took place entirely within my own head, it bears witness to the power of the (apparently) disembodied voice.

The volume and variety of such potential voices and visitors are, in my view, testament to the individual human mind and condition, and not the infinite possibilities offered by space and time to create such external realities. The evolutionary imperative and human advantage of such activity is outside this present review. In writing *Dumbstruck*, Steven Connor has produced a book full of fortean interest. Having said that, it is not an easy read. It is a scholarly work and, whilst my intellectual rigour may be wanting, having to re-read sentences several times to unlock their meaning can become wearing. However, it is worth the effort. We begin with a learned dissertation on the voice and the nature of speech. Like all things close and familiar, we do not easily recognise what is going on. When our own voices are recorded, we often don't recognise them or, if we do, we cringe in horror. What, then, of the ventriloqual voice, the illusion of the disembodied sound and the location or receptacle of the thrown voice? Connor takes 417 pages of dense discussion to address these and associated questions. Ventriloquism has undoubtedly been a human 'trick' since the dawn of man; the book begins with its first documentation in classical Greece and the Delphic oracle, takes in the Witch of Endor and touches on the Angel and Balaam's Ass, among many historical references.

En route to the present day, we visit possession in its many forms, including an extended airing, with ventriloqual insights, of the well-known case of the exorcism of John Darrell. We cover the *True and Briefe Report of the grievous Vexation by Satan of Mary Glover*. In the case of Nicole Obry, we learn how the identity of the possessors can be revealed by their distinct and "marvellously horrible voice(s)" and then "the cry or groaning of a great pig, the barking of a great dog, and the roaring of a great and agitated bull", thus revealing "Astaroth in the pig: Cerebrus in the dog, and Beelzebub in the bull".

Spiritualism is another great source of "invisible voices" invading darkened rooms and convincing the gullible and the astute alike. Other topics woven into the history of ventriloquism include prophecy, witchcraft, divination, miracles, magic, mesmerism, sorcery and even spontaneous combustion. The book becomes topical when discussing modern show business acts and ventriloquism in films (the doll Chucky, from the *Child's Play* series, is implicated in the Jamie Bulger case).

Although this is an academic work, Steven Connor is not without humour: "The choice of the drunken aristocrat for Ray Alan's Lord Charles figure was appropriate not only because tipsy speech makes things technically easier for the ventriloquist (if you try to speak without moving your lips you end up sounding like a half-sloshed hereditary peer anyway), but also because of the well-established infantile associations of the aristocracy". *Dumbstruck* is an important book and will reward study.

PETER COLEMAN

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT

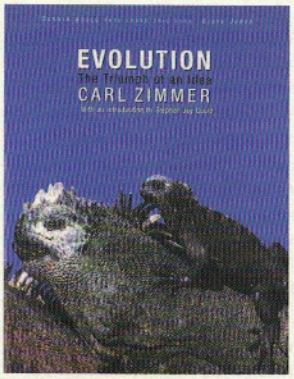
NOT EXACTLY CHILD'S PLAY, BUT WORTH READING **8**

EVOLUTION

THE TRIUMPH OF AN IDEA

CARL ZIMMER

WILLIAM HEINEMANN, 2002
HB, 364PP, FIGS, COLOUR & B&W ILLUS, BIB, IND
ISBN 0 434 00908 1



This is the accompanying volume to the recent PBS seven-part American TV series, *Evolution*, and could almost serve as a standard text of how Darwinists get it wrong.

They claim that the evidence to support neo-Darwinism is as solid as that which upholds the idea of the Earth orbiting the Sun. In reality, the only reasons why anyone today could think neo-Darwinism triumphant are the specious evidence presented in its favour and the censorship of scientific arguments against.

I am incredulous that, in his introduction, Stephen Jay Gould is still promoting the case of the Peppered Moth as supportive of natural selection, when on so many occasions it has been shown to be bogus.

The mutating of bacteria and viruses are Zimmer's examples of benign, spontaneous mutation. But unless you can show that the strains that come through to resist antibiotics were not already present to begin with, you may not claim that evolution has been demonstrated, for nothing new came about. The non inter-breeding of the finches of the Galapagos and the Herring gull and Lesser black-backed gulls are cited as evidence of speciation. In fact those finches and those gulls can interbreed, so why regard them as separate species?

Instances of fossil sequences demonstrating change above the species level may be very much disputed, as may claims of genetic similarity proving common ancestry.

Most scientists privately concede that there are serious objections to Darwinism, and in response to the PBS TV series 100 signed a statement of scepticism about the ability of natural selection of random mutations to account for the complexity of organisms.

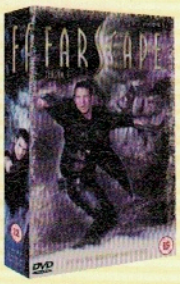
In March 1995 the *Times Higher Education Supplement* announced that it had commissioned a critique of Darwinism by journalist, Richard Milton. Richard Dawkins contacted the editor and lobbied against the publication of the article, which he had not seen. She caved in to this unscientific bullying and suppressed the piece. Dawkins interprets his role as professor for the public understanding of science at Oxford University as meaning he must prevent the public and academic community from gaining access to evidence that contradicts Darwinian doctrines. (If you want to read Milton's article go to www.alternativescience.com).

A *Times* leader of August 1992 commented that a critique of the limitations of neo-Darwinism "…will make fascinating television." Ten years has been too long a wait for such a genuinely scientific broadcast on this taboo subject.

JAMES PLASKETT

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT

DARWINISM TRIUMPHANT… OR AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS GONE? **2**



COMPETITION

The third series of cult sci-fi series *Farscape* has just been released on DVD. Thanks to Contender Entertainment Group, we have five sets to give away.

Just answer the following question:

WHO PLAYS JOHN CRICHTON, *FARSCAPE'S* LOST-IN-SPACE ASTRONAUT HERO?

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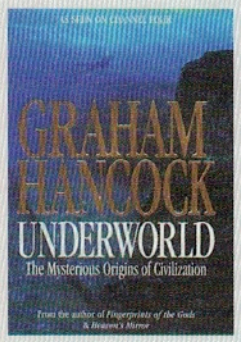

COMPETITION

Thanks to Penguin books, we have five copies of Graham Hancock's new book, *Underworld* to give away.

Just tell us:

WHICH US CONGRESSMAN REVIVED INTEREST IN ATLANTIS IN THE 19TH CENTURY?

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THE HIDDEN POWERS OF ANIMALS

DR KARL PN SHUKER

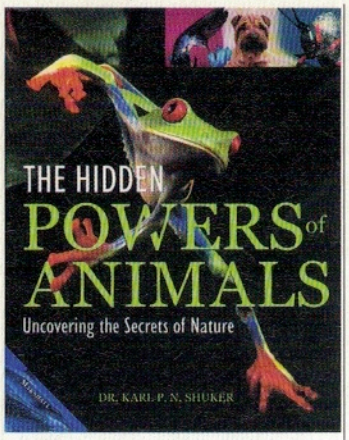
MARSHALL PUBLISHING, 2001
HB 240 PP, INDEX, BIB, ILLUS, £19.99
ISBN 1-84028-526-5

FT's very own Dr Shuker turns his attention away from the mysteries of cryptozoology in his latest book and focuses instead on the equally fascinating world of animal behaviour.

Divided into a number of sections, the book looks at everything from animal senses – ultrasonic hearing in bats, x-ray detecting cats – to animal emotions – the joy of reunited elephants and the grief of bereaved greylag geese. In between, there's plenty to wonder at and plenty of fortean favourites on show, from communicating parrots and homing cats and dogs to rat kings and entombed toads.

A perfect book for anyone who has ever wondered whether their cat is really dreaming or their dog is genuinely happy to see them, this is a treasure-trove of astonishing animal facts.

Since many of the theories discussed are based on recent research (which one would have to trawl through specialist publications to find), *Hidden Powers* is an extremely useful crash course in current ethological thinking and a perfect introduction to the subject for the general reader. Clear, concise and with plenty of useful explanations and diagrams, this is also just the kind of book to turn on younger readers to the wonders and pleasures of zoology.



And besides being hugely informative, *Hidden Powers* fulfils a perhaps even more important task – reminding us that as well as being fascinating 'others', our fellow creatures are also highly intelligent, hugely accomplished and frequently emotional beings deserving of a damn sight more respect from humans than is their usual lot.

DAVID SUTTON

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT

CHOCK-FULL OF NATURAL WONDERS **8**

ALSO RECEIVED

LUCIFER'S LEGACY

THE MEANING OF ASYMMETRY

FRANK CLOSE

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2001
PB 259PP, IND, B&W ILLUS, £8.99/$14.95
ISBN 0 19 866267 X

Physicist Close explores asymmetry from life to the Universe at large and asks if it can be traced back to a single act that took place at the origin of our Universe. He describes current research into the Big Bang, and describes the possible outcomes of the experiment currently being undertaken in Switzerland to recreate it.

THE SELF-MADE TAPESTRY

PATTERN FORMATION IN NATURE

PHILIP BALL

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2001
HB 287PP, IND, BIB, APPENDIXES, B&W & COL ILLUS, £12.50
ISBN 0 19 850243 5

An explanation, in non-technical terms, of nature's self-organisation and how natural patterns are made by simple, local interactions between nature's components parts. Clearly written by an editor of *Nature* and very beautifully illustrated.

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INTERESTING FACTS

- Before the programme was launched in America there was a public outcry from concerned parents who believed it would lead children to dabble in the paranormal - creating a programme with a truly 'cult' following.
- When the first episode aired in America, it was simulcast on the Fox network and on the **FREAKYLINKS** website, offering links to the sites mentioned on the show.
- The series was initially known as 'Fearsum' before changing its name to **FREAKYLINKS.**

- **FREAKYLINKS** is from writers Gregg Hale and David S Goyer, who were respectively responsible for the smash hit films **'The Blair Witch Project'** and **'Blade'.**

Starring ETHAN EMBRY ('That Thing You Do') as Derek
LISA SHERIDAN as Chloe
KARIM PRINCE ('Malcolm in the Middle') as Jason
LIZETTE CARRION as Lan
DENNIS CHRISTOPHER ('Profiler') as Vince Elsing

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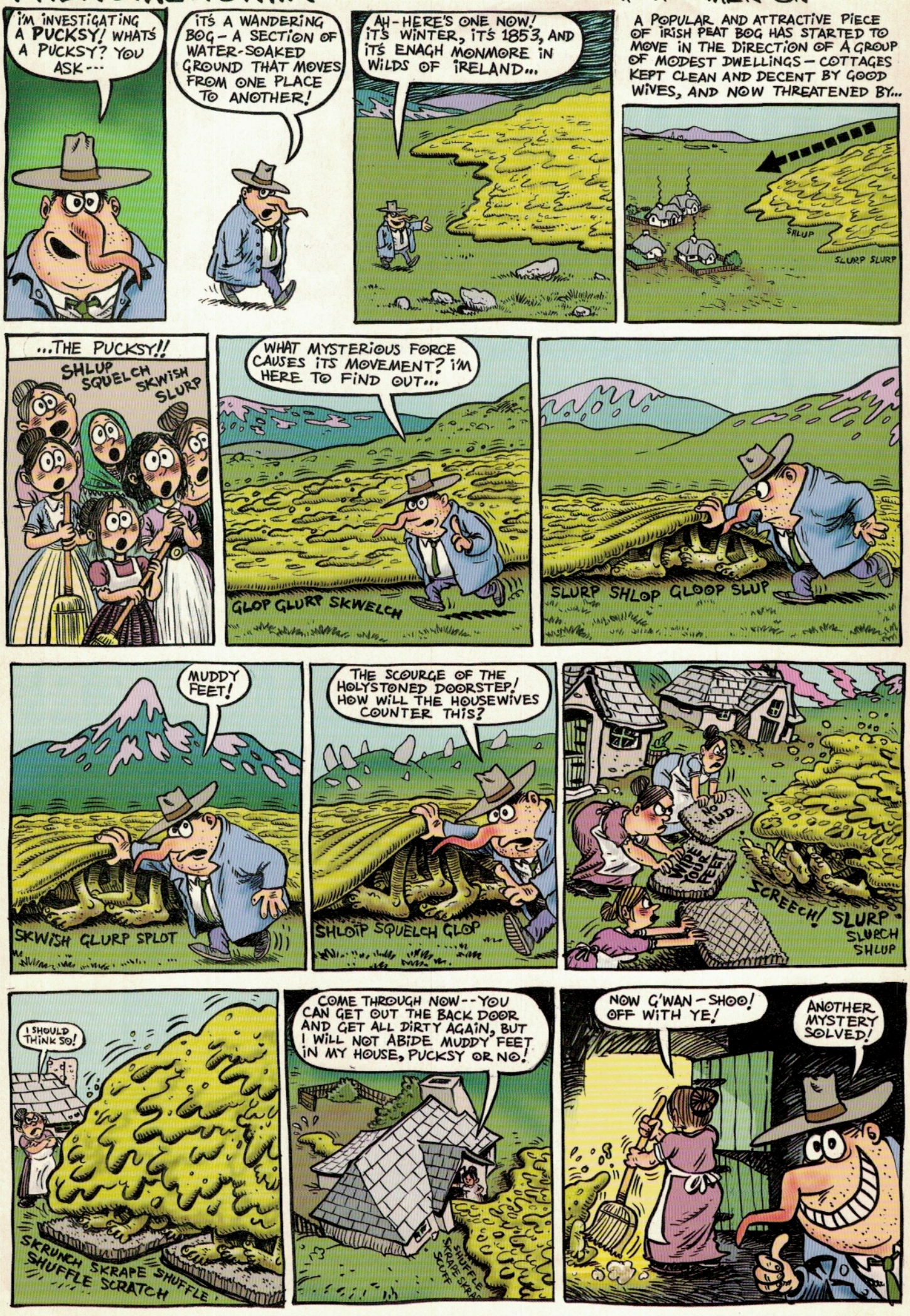
HUNT EMERSON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IT'S A WANDERING BOG - A SECTION OF WATER-SOAKED GROUND THAT MOVES FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER!
AH - HERE'S ONE NOW! IT'S WINTER, IT'S 1853, AND IT'S ENAGH MONMORE IN WILDS OF IRELAND...
A POPULAR AND ATTRACTIVE PIECE OF IRISH PEAT BOG HAS STARTED TO MOVE IN THE DIRECTION OF A GROUP OF MODEST DWELLINGS - COTTAGES KEPT CLEAN AND DECENT BY GOOD WIVES, AND NOW THREATENED BY...
SHLUP
SLURP SLURP
...THE PUCKSY!!
SHLUP SQUELCH SKWISH SLURP
WHAT MYSTERIOUS FORCE CAUSES ITS MOVEMENT? I'M HERE TO FIND OUT...
GLOP GLURP SKWELCH
SLURP SHLOP GLOOP SLUP
MUDDY FEET!
SKWISH GLURP SPLOT
THE SCOURGE OF THE HOLYSTONED DOORSTEP! HOW WILL THE HOUSEWIVES COUNTER THIS?
SHLOIP SQUELCH GLOP
NO MUD
SCREECH! SLURP SLURCH SHLUP
I SHOULD THINK SO!
SKRUNCH SKRAPE SHUFFLE SHUFFLE SCRATCH
COME THROUGH NOW--YOU CAN GET OUT THE BACK DOOR AND GET ALL DIRTY AGAIN, BUT I WILL NOT ABIDE MUDDY FEET IN MY HOUSE, PUCKSY OR NO!
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NOW G'WAN - SHOO! OFF WITH YE!
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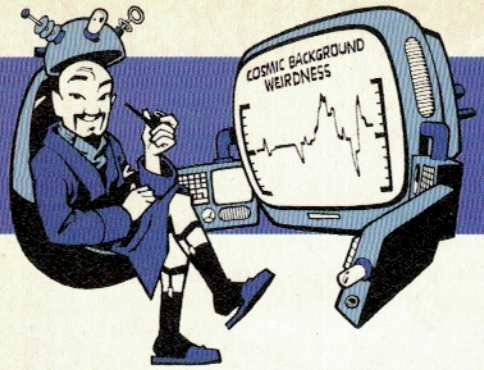

HIERophant

IN HIS FORTRESS OF ARROGANCE, DEEP BELOW THE HIMALAYAS, THE IMMORTAL ASCENDED MASTER KNOWN AS THE HIEROPHANT TRAVELS THE MORE DISREPUTABLE PATHS OF FORTEANA...

"I am a tree/creaking, creaking." Yes, it's time for one of the Hierophant's all-too-infrequent sorties into the realm of avant-garde poetry. *Candy Cotton Kid and the Faustian Wolf* is the catchy title of a new tome by one **Sandra Lester**, a former psychotherapist and hypnotherapist. Moreover, she helpfully explains, "ELEVEN OF MY POEMS HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED IN 2001" in "various magazines and anthologies". So what of her curiously-titled volume? "THIS RADICAL AND CHALLENGING NEW THEORY" deals, as if the title hadn't tipped you off, with the late Sylvia Plath, poet and late wife of the previous poet laureate, Ted Hughes. Early February saw the 39th anniversary of Plath's death, and to mark this important occasion, Ms Lester has launched *Candy Cotton Kid* on an unsuspecting world. She reckons, you see, that it is "highly likely" that Plath suffered early childhood sexual abuse, and that her work "throws new light on the enormity of HUGHES [sic] role as a HYPNOTIST in PLATH'S premature DEATH." Which I think YOU'LL agree IS at LEAST ORIGINAL. As if this wasn't enough, it does so "in the form of FREE VERSE and notes." Saints preserve us! We also note with some glee that the *Halifax Evening Courier* story on the matter concludes with one of the greatest sentences in the history of local journalism: "Ms Lester said her research had not brought her to Mytholmroyd but she hoped a visit would be possible one day."

Last month, we had cause to note the fabled **Erik Beckjord** was putting it about that he, himself and in person, was the Mothman so famously chronicled by **John Keel** and recently to be seen haunting our cinema screens. Matters have since taken a faintly distressing turn, with the Wireless Flash internet news service reporting a feud, of a kind, between Beckjord and

our very own **Loren Coleman**. Erik, displaying the rhetorical skills for which he is renowned among all who have come into contact with him, has reportedly damned Coleman as "an idiot" for maintaining that Mothman is a real being. Beckjord's theory has now expanded to encompass the possibility that all sightings of Mothman were down to "people" having out-of-body experiences. Coleman responded with a good deal more dignity than others might, sighing and explaining that whenever sensible cryptozoologists start making some real progress "Erik shows up and makes a ridiculous claim like this one." If only he were limited to cryptozoology, Loren.

I'm always up for a cheap shot or two in the general direction of the dour so-and-so's at CSICOP, especially when they're so keen to offer up material on a plate. **Gene Emery**, writing on the group's website, has issued a not-at-all morbid challenge to the nation's psychics. It's a bit long-winded to quote in full, but in brief, it's a call to the world's psychics to give us all a free demonstration. After a quiet gloat about the fact that not a single psychic or astrologer managed to predict the events of 11 September, he lays down his challenge: find Osama! Or, more accurately, "identify the date that Osama bin Laden is captured or his body is found." My spies tell me there's a strong possibility that there's an ulterior motive, as Mr Emery is rumoured to have drawn Bin Laden in his office's Dead Pool this year.

Now here's a thing. Most people reading this will, I hope, be aware of **Groom Lake Air Force Base** in the US. Famously, it houses Area 51, where various ufologists of variable reliability allege that all manner of naughtiness goes on. Well, it seems that some time in September, just after the September 11th attacks, US President **George Bush** issued a Presidential Determination with some interesting ramifications. It "exempted the U.S. Air Force's operating location near Groom Lake, Nev., from any federal, state, interstate, or local hazardous or solid waste laws that might require the disclosure of classified information concerning that operating location to unauthorized persons... Information concerning activities at the operating location near Groom Lake has been properly determined to be classified, and its disclosure would be harmful to national security. Continued protection of this information is, therefore, in the paramount interest of the United States." Move along. Nothing to see here.

If you have a lead on any paranormal gossip, share it with the Hierophant... hierophant@ifgmags.com

KIERON DWYER

NEXT MONTH IN FT

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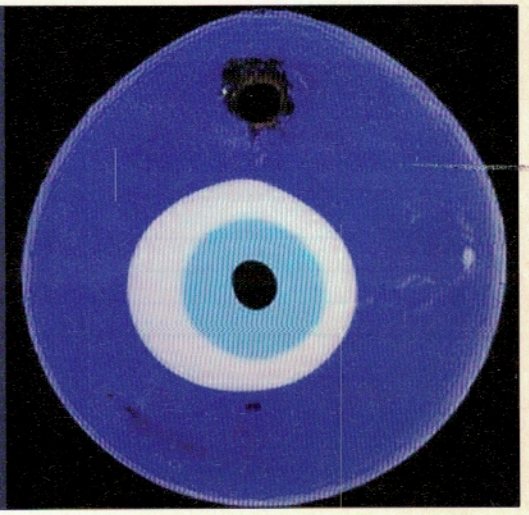
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